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Rafsanjani, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8

Ross returns with 'new approach'

AMERICA'S Middle East peace mediator Dennis Ross began a new mission to the region yesterday amid deepening pessimism over his ability to revive the stalled Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

Ross was scheduled to meet Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu last night before heading to Gaza for additional talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The American envoy returned after Israeli President Ezer Weizman secured a pledge from Arafat to restore security coordination between the two sides at a meeting on the Israel-Gaza border Tuesday night. No other progress was reported.

Weizman, whose post is largely ceremonial, said after the meeting — only the second high-level Israel-PLO contact in more than seven weeks of deadlock — that Arafat had agreed to meetings between security chiefs on both sides.

"This point was agreed upon. I hope that it will begin operating within a few days," Weizman told reporters.

Palestinians were more circumspect, with Arafat saying only that he and Weizman had "reiterated the importance of preserving security for both our peoples".

A PLO official said Arafat rebuffed a request by Weizman to meet Netanyahu.

Senior PLO negotiator Yasser Abd Rabbou said the meeting had done nothing to resolve the crisis sparked in March by work on a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, adding that security talks would only be held with US officials present. "None of the basic issues were resolved during the meeting... Resumption of negotiations will not take place before full cessation of settlement activities," Abd Rabbou said.

"Weizman insisted on restoring coordination. We have agreed on meetings at the security level that will be attended by the Americans," he said. The first meeting is expected to be held today between Palestinian and Israeli security chiefs.

Palestinian sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Ross was likely to urge Israel to freeze building new settlements and refrain from actions that pre-empt final status negotiations. Since the American ideas do not deal directly with halting construction in East Jerusalem, they remain unacceptable to the Palestinian Authority.

"The settlement in Abu Ghneim is the main issue," a Palestinian official said. "Even if the Authority is ready to make concessions it cannot, for the simple reason that what affects the future of Jerusalem cannot be a matter of compromise because it affects the interests of the entire Muslim and Christian worlds."

The Clinton administration does not appear to be ready for prolonged, Camp David style negotiations because it cannot afford to offer solutions to such sensitive issues as Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and borders.

And yet, an administration official said the US role will continue to be active on substantive and procedural issues. "We are ready for an active, interventionist approach," he said.

Ross is expected to visit Cairo on Saturday.

***Tarek Hassan** in Gaza;*
***Hoda Tewfik** in Washington;*
Wire dispatches

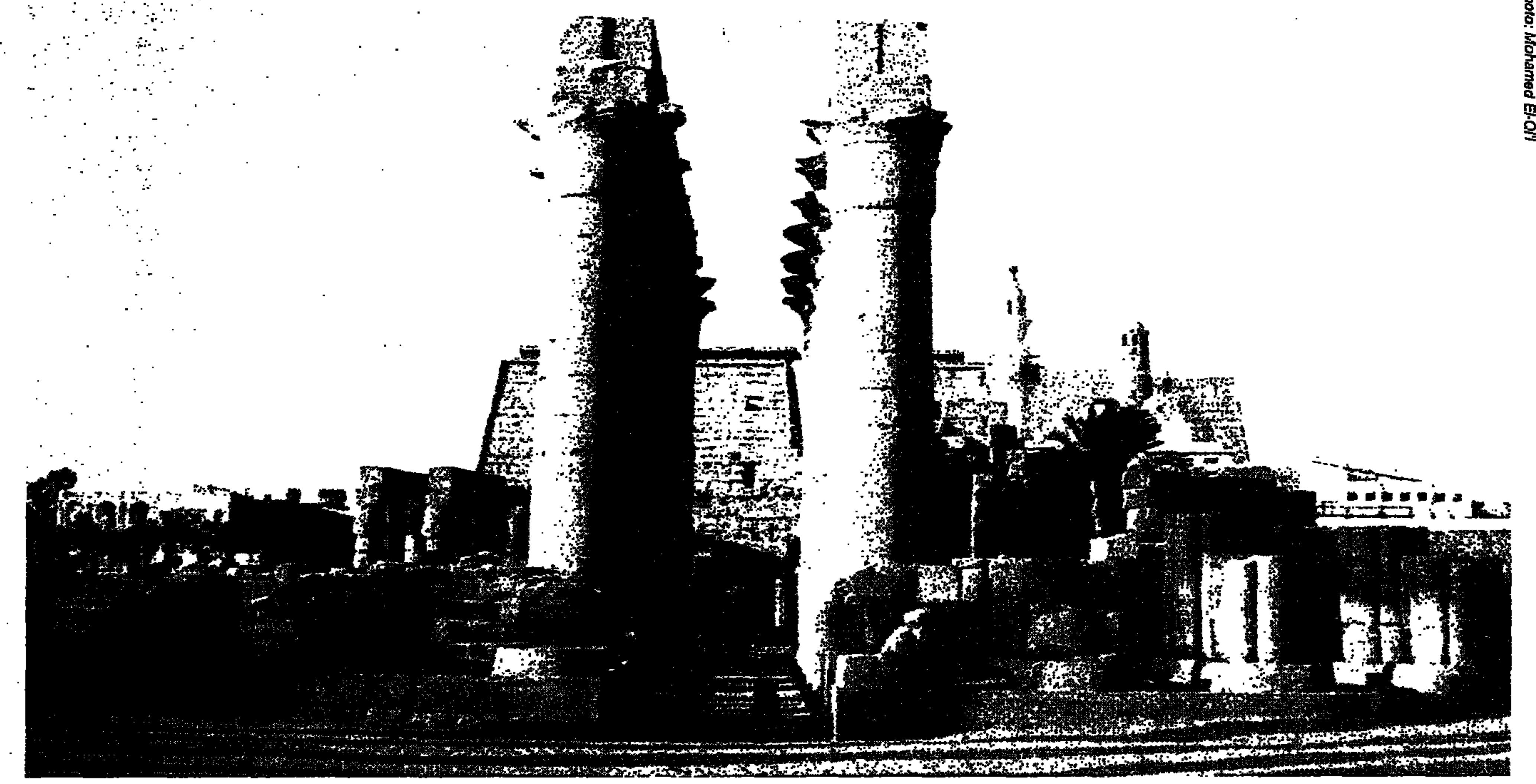


photo: Mohamed El-Orfi

Amenhotep revisited

In a gala festival, attended by President Mubarak, the newly renovated Temple of Luxor was unveiled to the world. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** and **Nevine Khalil** were there



The 3,500-year-old Temple of Luxor was swathed in gold and silver light on Tuesday night during a gala festival, attended by President Hosni Mubarak, to mark the end of extensive renovations.

Mubarak, after opening a mummy museum, the first of its kind in the world, attended a concert held in the temple's court of King Amenhotep III, who ruled Egypt from Luxor between 1417 and 1379 BC.

The renovations included dismantling and then reassembling 22 of the temple's towering columns threatened with collapse by seeping underground water.

"The restoration of these columns and their reinstallation repeats exactly what happened thousands of years ago and is like a dream come true," said Culture Minister Farouk Hosni.

Mubarak, accompanied by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak and officials, toured the site before taking their seats in an open-air theatre in front of the temple. With the temple behind them and a cluster of palm trees on either side, six soloists chanted "happy birthday" to the president, an occasion which he celebrated on Sunday.

Conductors Selim Sahab and Mustafa Nagui treated the gathering of about 500 to an hour of musical variety that included the Victory March from *Aida* and Umm Kalthoum's patriotic ballad, "Egypt Speaks About Herself".

The 50-ton, 12-metre high pillars, with crowns sculpted like papyrus buds, make up a court considered the glory of the ancient temple, built on the east bank of the Nile.

Amenhotep, known as a great builder and hunter under whose reign the empire reached its zenith, built the court "for Amoun-Ra, king of the gods, of fine white sandstone, made very high and wide", according to the ancient building inscription. A majestic avenue of sphinxes leads to the temple which was also once flanked by two red granite obelisks, one of which now stands in the Place de la Concorde in Paris.

Hosni described the restoration of the columns, at a cost of LE9 million, as a "historic achievement". The idea was first floated in 1987 when a serious slanting of the columns, caused by water seepage, was observed by antiquities officials. Salt crystals appeared on the walls, causing some inscriptions to disappear.

"The reconstruction of these columns is the result of concerted efforts , carried out for the first time by Egyptian restorers, archaeologists and experts. This is a 100 per cent Egyptian project," Hosni told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Mohamed El-Saghir, in charge of the antiquities of Upper Egypt, said the columns were restored "with sandstone from El-Selsela mountain, the same place from which the ancient Egyptians quarried."

The level of underground water was reduced and the ground reinforced with sandstone to guarantee that no leakage would occur in the future. At the same time the temple's first lighting system was installed.

And yet the scheme came under fire from some archaeologists, with one describing the process of dismantling and restoration as nothing more than a "cloning" of Amenhotep.

"It is not going to be as it was," said one archaeologist, who asked that his name be withheld. "It is not easy to dismantle these huge columns and then put them back together without damaging them."

Brushing aside this argument, Hosni insisted that "the columns have been restored to their original beauty. The whole process is meant to consolidate them against the wear and tear of time and environmental factors."

In addition to the renovated temple, the site now boasts a new mummy museum, devoted to explaining the ancient Egyptian practice of mummification. Displayed inside are the mummies of humans and animals as well as five beautifully painted sarcophagi. Paintings on the walls provide a full description of the various stages of mummification and among the objects on display are the mummies of a fish found in Esna, a newly-born crocodile, a goose and the leg of a goat wrapped in linen.

"Mummification is the most sacred process practised by the ancient Egyptians and tourists are curious to know the mystery behind it. This museum is meant to reveal some of the secrets of mummification," Nasri Iskandar, who supervised work at the museum, told the *Weekly*. The museum was built at a cost of LE2 million.

Tourists will also have easier access to the Nile's West Bank— home to the Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens — after Monday's inauguration by Mubarak of a new bridge linking the two banks of the river.

(see. p.2)

Money talks

The unprecedented expansion by American Express of its operations in Egypt reflects growing confidence in the country's economic prospects. **Aziza Sami** reports

John Ward, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive of the American Express Bank, announced this week that the bank plans to consolidate its presence in Egypt, expanding activities in several directions. Ward, who was speaking at a press conference hosted by Al-Ahram at its downtown Cairo offices on Monday, said the decision reflects the success of Egypt's economic reforms, and is intended to allow the bank to capitalise on positive projected growth rates in the coming decade. The bank will bring in financial teams from its parent organisation, the American Express Company, to alert key exporters worldwide of Egypt's potential.

Ward met with Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri earlier this week to discuss ways of promoting investment in Egypt. "There are plans for the American Express Company, of which the bank is a subsidiary, to bring operations to Egypt," he said. "I am talking here of the full power of the American Express Company to support the activities of the bank." The bank's parent company offers broad-based financial services and manages assets of $150 billion.

"We have more investments capitalised at LE100 million in Egypt than in any other country," noted Ward..

Financial teams have already been set up in Singapore and Western Europe to help in financing trade. East Asian investors seeking new outlets will be alerted to investment potentials in Egypt which can become a major production base for goods destined for other Middle Eastern and African countries. "The Egyptian economy, for instance, complements Israel's. They have very high-tech production but they need to import things which they once used to produce. These can be produced in Egypt at a lower price," Ward told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

The bank also intends to bring investment opportunities in Southeast Asia, Latin America and the US to Egyptian investors who might want to diversify their portfolios, though Ward admitted that "this [move] would be for the affluent rather than the broad-based market". The bank is also seeking to expand activities in derivatives, loan syndication and asset sales "as well as helping syndicate confirmations of credit sellers in order to increase our capacity to serve customers".

These steps, Ward believes, will stimulate capital activity in Egypt and will lead to "a very successful brokerage operation".

Expanding operations in Egypt has been on the cards for some time, with the final decision to go ahead being influenced by the bank's already strong position in the country.

The "spectacular success", as Ward describes it, of last year's international public offering was one reason American Express was expanding its operations.

"When we planned the initial fund, we never dreamed 57,000 people would show up. The initial offering was an LE100 million fund, but the total offers amounted to LE900 million. Of the 57,000 individuals, only 2,000 of our own customers showed up." "This is a tremendous expression of the desire here in Egypt to invest in the free market system. The fact that so much capital could be raised in the market was very exciting."

Along with these planned expansions in operations, the bank also intends to participate in the funding of projects in the New Valley and Toushki. "We will basically team up with a number of banks, in this case. While we have a role here, we cannot provide the size of financing required for these projects," he said.

The bank's decision to implement these steps reflects its confidence in on-going economic reforms in Egypt. The Egyptian economy, according to Ward, is "very well prepared for the latter part of this decade, and the first part of the next, to witness very high economic growth."

The fact that "the rating agencies, which are critical in rating foreign debt, have put Egypt in the investment grade will now allow it to raise money at very cheap rates in comparison with the past," noted Ward. "Inflation has come down dramatically, as well as the budget deficit. In fact, the reserve position, which totals $19 billion in foreign currency, is very strong. Egypt now has 16 months of imports, which at one point was only was only six months ".

These figures are telling, given that the process of reform in Egypt was more difficult than for other countries with a solid history of private sector operations. Given that "there were many state-owned enterprises...the country's privatisation process has been of great importance."

Ward believes that "the economy has made some impressive strides on the road to reform over the past 10 years", adding that, "some countries just don't have the ability to make this change".

Al-Ahram Weekly

8 - 14 May 1997



Obituary

Saheir El-Qalamawi: A pioneer of women's rights

Dr Saheir El-Qalamawi, a professor of Arabic literature and champion of women's right to education, died on Sunday at the age of 84. She had spent the last months of her life in hospital, suffering from age-related diseases.

Born to enlightened parents, El-Qalamawi graduated from the American College for Girls at the age of 17. She wanted to study medicine but, to her surprise and chagrin, found that women were not admitted to the Faculty of Medicine.

She tried to persuade her parents to send her abroad but to no avail. But she was resolute in her determination to pursue her education. This resolve, she once remarked, "is part of my character. I always fought and struggled for what is right and I never gave in."

Although not a feminist in the usual sense, El-Qalamawi played an important role in asserting the right of women to pursue higher studies. Having been refused admission to the Faculty of Medicine, she turned to the Faculty of Arts, and it was thanks to Dr Taha Hussein, dean of the faculty at the time, that she was allowed to enrol. Although she was a graduate of an American school, she nevertheless chose the Arabic section, showing great enthusiasm for Arabic language and literature. El-Qalamawi completed her university studies in 1933, becoming the first woman graduate of the Arabic section. She continued to pioneer her way in academia, becoming a graduate assistant in 1937 and, on obtaining her PhD in 1941, a lecturer in Arabic.

The subject of her doctoral thesis was *The Thousand and One Nights*. It was her interest in this book which added yet another dimension to her academic activities, namely children's culture. *The Thousand and One Nights*, with its rich imaginative streak and diverse adventures, has become a source of inspiration for many children's writers. When Sarwat Okasha, then minister of culture, established the Advisory Bureau for Children's Culture in 1967, El-Qalamawi was chosen as a member of its board.



In the same year, Okasha appointed her as chairwoman of the General Egyptian Book Organisation. The organisation flourished during her tenure, particularly in its production of children's books. In one year, she produced a package of 100 books, beautifully illustrated, in cooperation with a leading Italian firm. When, in 1968, the Supreme Council for Children's Culture was established, she was its first head.

El-Qalamawi was also an Afro-Asian activist and a delegate to many of the conferences of that movement. When the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation came into being in 1957, it led to the formation of two important offshoots, representing the interests of Afro-Asian Writers and Afro-Asian women. El-Qalamawi was involved in both.

In her personal life, she was opposed to traditional ideas about women. In the same way that she challenged prejudices against women's acquisition of knowledge, she likewise rebelled against the concept of arranged marriage.

But the grip of convention was strong enough to prevent her marrying without parental permission. As a PhD student in London, she met fellow student Yehia El-Khasab, also preparing his PhD. They fell in love, but waited until their return to Cairo to get married.

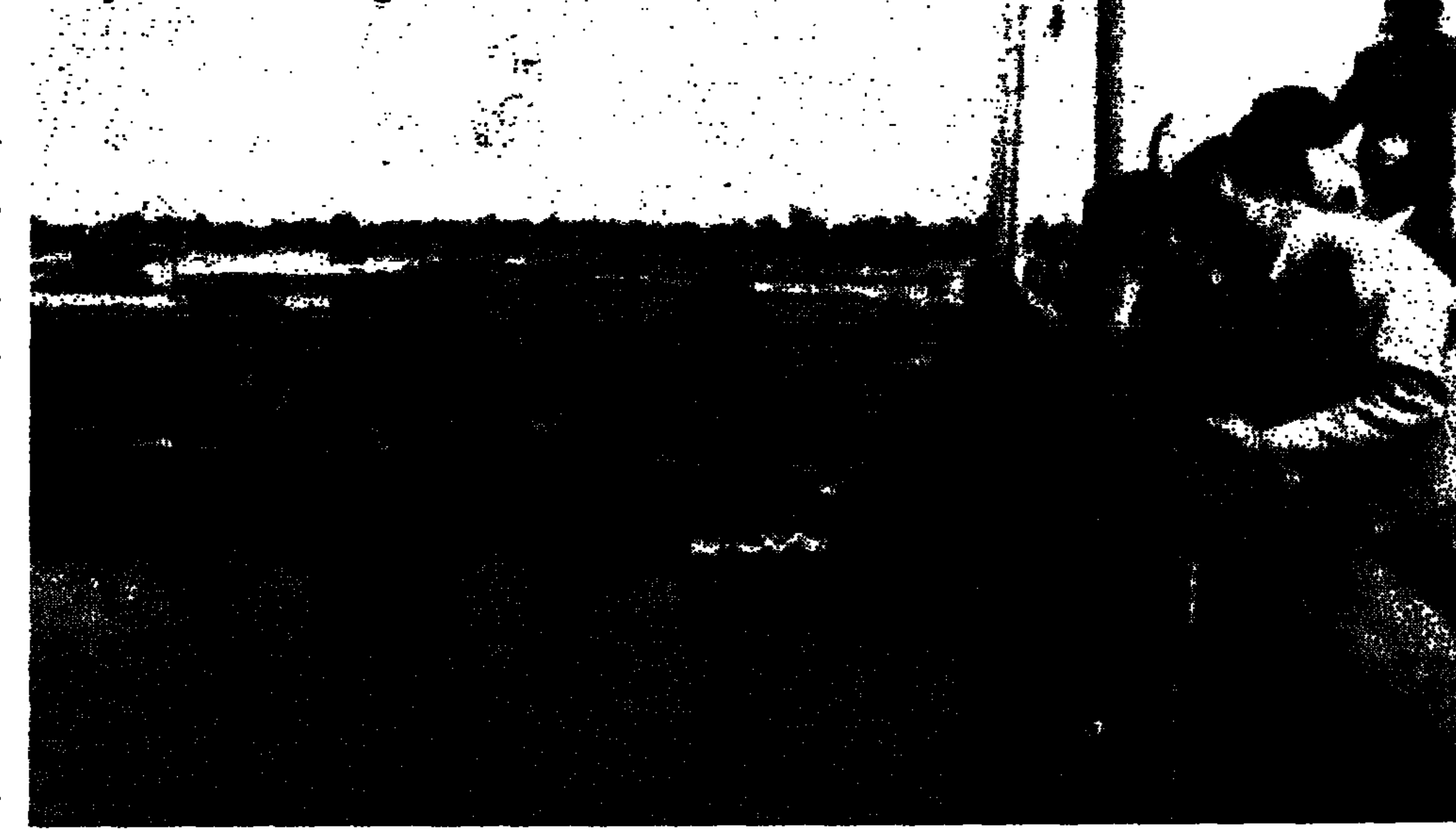
Amid her academic career and involvement in diverse activities, El-Qalamawi found the time to produce 12 books of scholarly writing and criticism. Her best known is the autobiographical *Tales of My Grandmother*, which has been translated into English. In this book, she underlined the folkloric role of grandparents in preserving love of the country.

El-Qalamawi rejected the idea that, in literature, there is a separate "women's literature." She once said: "I simply refuse to accept the existence of so-called women's literature. There is simply good and bad writing... Women are an integral part of society. Their problems are interwoven into the social, political and economic fabric of society."

Like her mentor, Taha Hussein, El-Qalamawi was a believer in the internationality of culture. Having studied European, particularly English, literature, she embraced comparative studies as a field of research for her post-graduate students. One of them was Jihan El-Sadat, wife of the late President Anwar El-Sadat.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Bridge to the Valley of the Kings



PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak inaugurated on Tuesday the 5.2-km-long Luxor bridge, connecting the main road east of the Nile with the west bank home to the Valley of Kings and the Valley of the Queens — the nation's largest Pharaonic necropolis. Mubarak arrived in Luxor from Aswan in the early afternoon, under a scorching sun and temperatures estimated at 41C.

Joined by a large entourage, the President listened to a 15-minute briefing by Transport Minister Suleiman Metwalli, that covered the Luxor bridge as well as seven other bridges the ministry is constructing across the nation. In addition to providing pedestrians and motorists with a picturesque promenade across the Nile, the LE35 million-bridge will also be used in transporting the sugar-cane crop of about 40,000 feddans to sugar plants at Armant on the western bank.

The railings of the bridge are adorned with gold-coloured lotus flowers, set in the black bars. At each end of the bridge, two solemn statues of the god Horus, the protector against evil, stand in front of grey obelisks.

After the opening ceremony, Mubarak, accompanied by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif, Minister of Energy Maher Abaza, and Minister of Housing Mohamed Ibrahim Suleiman, took a short brisk walk on the bridge, stopping at times to wave to curious onlookers.

The construction of the bridge had triggered a controversy in the past, with some archaeologists expressing concern that it would introduce heavy traffic in the vicinity of the world heritage site on the western bank, thus exposing antiquities to traffic pollutants. There were also fears that the bridge might encourage the inhabitants of the area to construct housing haphazardly, which would have adverse effects on the site.

At the time, Mubarak ordered the establishment of a committee which came to the conclusion that the bridge be completed, provided strict measures are taken to conserve the archaeological site.

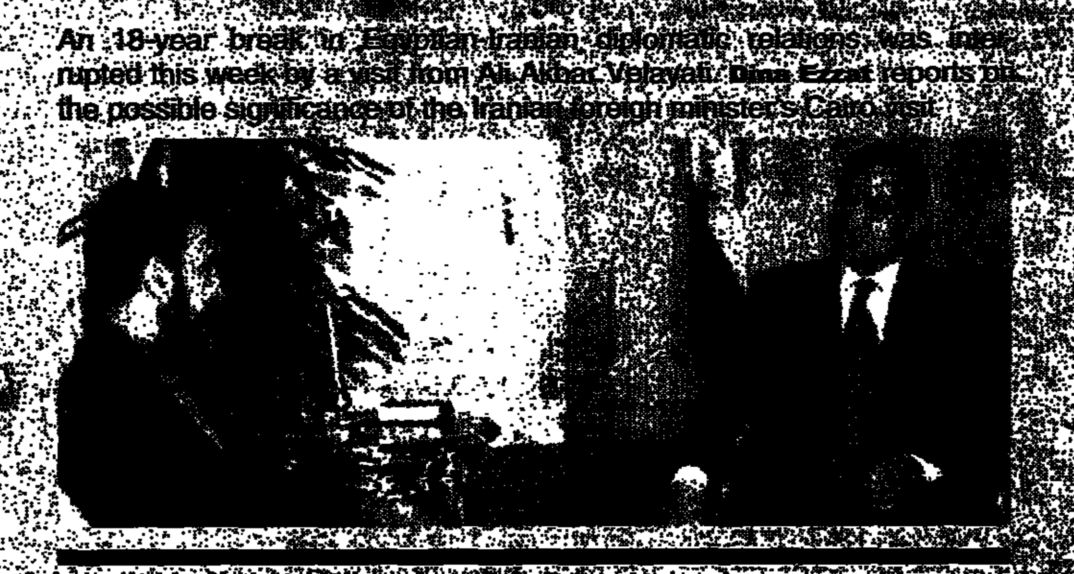
Culture Minister Farouk Hosni declared the area extending from the bridge to the antiquity site an archaeological preserve, falling under the antiquities protection law.

A joint committee of experts from the Supreme Council of Antiquities, the Supreme Luxor Council and planning and tourism experts was set up to keep a close watch on any activity in the area.

Reported from Luxor by ***Nevine Khalil*** *and* ***Omayma Abdel-Latif***

A thaw in Cairo-Tehran relations

An 18-year break in Egyptian-Iranian diplomatic relations was interrupted this week by a visit from Ali Akbar Velayati. Dina Ezzat reports on the possible significance of the Iranian foreign minister's visit



Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati met with President Hosni Mubarak on Tuesday to convey an invitation from President Hashemi Rafsanjani to a summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) scheduled for December in Tehran.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said Mubarak has accepted the invitation but, in an indication the president may not attend personally, Moussa said that "circumstances may change" by December. In that case, Egypt would be represented by the foreign minister.

Velayati described his talks with both Mubarak and Moussa as "very frank," "successful," and "very friendly."

"We do believe that cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Egypt should be constructive," Velayati said following a lengthy session with Moussa on Monday night.

The talks between the Iranian official and the Egyptian side dealt with the proposed agenda of the OIC summit, which includes Jerusalem, Afghanistan and the conditions of Muslims in Central Asia.

"Egypt and Iran are influential member-states of the OIC. Their cooperation could certainly benefit this organisation," said Mohamed Ezzeddin, assistant to the foreign minister for OIC affairs.

But Velayati's visit, diplomats from both sides agreed, is not just about conveying an invitation to a summit. According to one Egyptian diplomat, "This visit has more to do with discussing the future of relations between the two countries."

Sources believe that the time is ripe for warmer bilateral relations. "Iran is facing threats of a US military strike, while Cairo is facing US attempts to politically marginalise it in the region. If the two come together, the US would have to reconsider its policies," one source said.

Moussa said that the areas of difference between Cairo and Tehran were discussed during the talks but the delegations did not go into too many details. According to a source close to the Iranian delegation, who asked that his name be withheld, "Velayati is here in a show of good faith. He will listen to what the Egyptians have to say, but he won't go down on his knees for them to resume full diplomatic relations."

Iran broke off diplomatic relations with Egypt after it signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. Relations worsened when Egypt provided shelter to the overthrown shah and took Iraq's side in its 1980-1988 war with Iran. Egypt also accused Iran of providing support to anti-government militants based in Sudan.

At present, the two main areas of difference between the two countries concern Gulf security and what Egypt views as Iran's attempt to export the ideology of its Islamic revolution to the Arab states.

"Iran wants to dominate security measures in the Gulf and this is something that Cairo does not go along with," an informed source said. "For one thing, this dominance is a matter of concern to the Arab Gulf states, to which Egypt is bound by strong ties, and for another, it would undermine Egypt's role as the influential country in the region." The source also noted that the Islamic regime in Sudan, which has Iranian backing, "has been giving Cairo headaches."

During the Cairo visit, Velayati denied any link between his government and the Egyptian militant groups.

Iran, on the other hand, has long criticised Cairo's close relations with Washington and its peace policies with Israel.

But sources from both sides conceded that, despite the various disagreements between Cairo and Tehran, there are factors that could bring the two nations together. As one diplomatic source suggested, "neither country likes the fact that the oil-rich Arab Gulf states depend on the West for territorial security. They also believe that a rapprochement between the two nations would prompt Washington to adopt a less anti-Arab attitude in the peace process."

Since 1991, the two countries have kept "interest sections" in each other's capitals. "Cairo and Tehran could also have very productive economic relations that could give a boost to the economies of the two states," commented Mahmood Farag, head of the Iranian department at the Foreign Ministry. Rough estimates suggest that full economic ties between the two states could be worth $5 billion a year.

According to Farag, Cairo could help open up the African market to Tehran which could reciprocate by helping Egypt find better ways into the Asian market.

Relations between Cairo and Tehran "have experienced an upturn over the last five years due to their cooperation on the Islamic scene, and the continuation of contacts will allow the atmosphere between the two countries to be cleared up," Velayati said.

Speaking at a meeting with Cairo University professors on Tuesday, Velayati asserted that his country was keen on boosting its relations with Cairo in all fields. He particularly stressed the importance of increasing cultural and scientific exchange.

Moussa has said, on more than one occasion recently, that the tension between Egypt and Iran should not become permanent. On Tuesday, after the Moussa-Velayati meeting, Moussa said the Egyptian-Iranian talks had produced good results that would open the way for a resumption of full diplomatic relations.

Egypt acts to salvage peace process

Continuing efforts to salvage the faltering peace process, Cairo played host to the Syrian and Palestinian presidents and a special European envoy. Dina Ezzat and Nevine Khalil watched the diplomatic scene

Cairo intensified its efforts this week to break the stalemate in the Middle East peace process, with President Hosni Mubarak meeting with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad last Thursday and with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Monday. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa also held talks with Miguel Moratinos, the special envoy of the European Union.

Mubarak and Assad, who met at the Aqaba Gulf resort of Sharm El-Sheikh, appeared pessimistic about the prospects of reviving the stalled peace effort. Assad told a joint news conference that the policies of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu "indicate that the doors to peace are closed." Mubarak expressed the hope that Israel would take action to give a push to the peace process "before it is laid to rest."

Assad, confirming Syria's commitment to peace, said: "We want this peace, but I can tell you now that the road is long."

Mubarak and Assad agreed that an Arab summit was unnecessary for the time being, indicating that the resolutions of last June's Cairo summit were still valid. "There is no need to hold a new Arab summit until we reach a dead end, which would require new decisions," Mubarak said.

He added that consultations were continuing with the United States, but a formula had not been reached yet because of "difficulties between the US and Israel." Mubarak said more time was needed and that Israel should understand that "peace, stability and cooperation have a price, which is the return of all [Arab] lands."

Assad stressed the need for a European initiative, declaring that "Europe can play a big role" in reactivating the peace process.

Mubarak and Arafat met in Cairo on Monday ahead of Tuesday's meeting between the Palestinian leader and Israeli President Ezer Weizman at the Eretz crossing-point in the Gaza Strip and the return of America's special envoy, Dennis Ross, to the region.

After talks on Sunday night between Arafat and Moussa, the Palestinians expressed doubts that Ross would carry fresh ideas for breaking the deadlock that would be acceptable to them.

"Ross came to the region [several times] and said that he would listen [to the Palestinians and Israelis] and report back to Mr Clinton. Now we hope that he will have something to say," said top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Ereikat. In his view, Ross should have one target in mind: "to rescue the Arabs from the mud through which Netanyahu has been dragging them."

Moratinos, fresh from talks with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in Jerusalem, met with Moussa on Monday. "I am here to share with the Egyptians our ideas on how to get rid of the deadlock and get the Palestinian track moving," the European envoy said.

The ideas he brought to Cairo included the halt of Jewish construction in Arab East Jerusalem in return for stepped-up Palestinian-Israeli security cooperation and a bilateral agreement to advance the final-status negotiations.

Israel has shown little sympathy with the European initiative, opting, instead, to work with Ross. According to diplomats, the Europeans are currently revising their initiative, trying to make it more palatable to Israel while still meeting the minimum Palestinian demands.

The Palestinians say they would accept an initiative that includes "a response to unilateral Israeli decisions, the confiscation of land, the expansion of settlements, the building of Israeli roads around the Palestinian territories and the pre-empting of the final status talks."

"The issue has to be dealt with in its entirety," Arafat said, following the talks with Moussa.

A few days earlier, there were reports that Arafat might agree to go back to the negotiating table, even if Israel did not stop construction in East Jerusalem, provided Israel gave the green light for building a Palestinian harbour and airport in Gaza and stopped the systematic confiscation of identity cards from the Arab inhabitants of East Jerusalem.

"You cannot have peace and settlements at the same time," said Moussa. "The settlement policy destroys negotiations and contradicts the spirit of negotiations."

Moussa and Moratinos said they were looking forward to hearing what Ross had to say. "We hope he will bring ideas similar to the ideas we defend," said the EU envoy. He also expressed hope that "some openings could be made and some ideas could be accepted" as a result of the Arafat-Weizman meeting.

Moratinos pledged that the Europeans would continue working "24 hours a day" to revive the peace process. He sounded confident that the European initiative would serve as the basis of a solution. "The European ideas were proposed first and these are the ideas that, in fact, have a general consensus," Moratinos said, nevertheless conceding that some parties still needed to be convinced.

Egyptian diplomats said Cairo was pushing hard for the European initiative because it meets the basics of the Arab demands.

Moussa denied reports that Egypt and Syria had disagreed on the need for an Arab summit. "There are no differences. When there is a need for a summit, it will take place," he said.

Azam faces fresh charge

Alleged Israeli spy Azam Azam now technically faces the death penalty after a new charge was levelled against him by prosecution authorities. Khaled Dawoud reports

Azam Azam, an Arab-Israeli standing trial on charges of spying, has been served a new accusation by the State Security Prosecutor which, legal sources said, technically carries the death penalty. But the sources said a death sentence was unlikely because Azam is not charged with gathering military information.

Azam, along with an Egyptian and two Israeli women, was charged with "criminal complicity for communicating [with a foreign country] with the intention of harming Egypt's national interest."

Originally, Azam was accused of providing assistance to the first defendant in the case, Emad Ismail, an Egyptian. According to Azam's lawyer, Farid El-Dib, this charge is punishable by a maximum 15 years imprisonment. The "assistance" took the form of providing him with female underwear which, prosecutors said, produced a secret ink when soaked in water. The ink could be used in writing letters to the Israeli intelligence, Mossad.

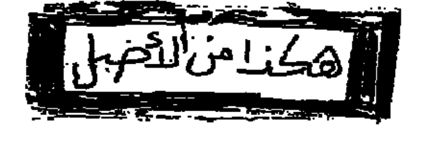
Azam allegedly took the underwear from two Israeli women, also of Druze origin, who work for the Mossad. The two, Zahra Youssef Greiss and Mona Ahmed Shawahneh, are outside Egypt and face trial in absentia.

Azam was also accused last Monday of taking part with Greiss and Shawahneh in offering money to Ismail to lure him to work for the Israeli intelligence. Azam was informed of the new charge at the Tora Prison, south of Cairo, official sources said.

According to prosecutors, the information which Ismail was allegedly paid for was related to Egypt's new industrial cities and the economic activities taking place there. Thus, the case could be treated as one of economic espionage.

The trial of Azam, Ismail and the two Israeli women opened on 24 April and was quickly adjourned to 18 May because Ismail's lawyer, Ahmed Bakr, failed to show up. He told reporters that he meant to arrive late in order to get the court to adjourn hearings and thus allow him time to study the case and prepare his defence.

In the opening hearings, both Azam and Ismail denied the charges, insisting that they were innocent. The lawyers of the two defendants claimed the evidence against their clients was flimsy and expressed confidence that they would be acquitted.



Philosopher faces apostasy charge

Human rights groups rallied to the defence of a philosophy professor after his writings were condemned by an Al-Azhar scholar as questioning the tenets of Islam. Shaden Shehab reports

Hanafi

Yehia Ismail, secretary-general of Al-Azhar Scholars Front, issued a statement last week accusing Hassan Hanafi, a Cairo University philosophy professor, and one of the country's most renowned authorities on Islamic thought, of challenging the teachings of Islam in his writings. The statement was printed by *Afaq Arabiya* (Arab Horizons), a publication of the Liberal Party. Ismail later told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that it had not been intended for publication. The Scholars Front is a group of around 2,000 conservative theologians who take it upon themselves to monitor Islamic thought and writings.

Ismail's statement said that Hanafi, who also serves as secretary-general of the Egyptian Philosophy Society, "is responsible for a destructive scheme against which the entire Islamic nation should be mobilised... This scheme has heaped scorn, mockery and derision on every feature of the nation's religion."

The statement accused Hanafi of denying the miracle of the Holy Qur'an — that it is God's revealed word — and demanded his expulsion from Cairo University. Hanafi's "scheme", the statement said, "aims at destroying everything that is holy and undermining every ethic, necessitating a general alert."

Ismail, in a telephone interview with the *Weekly*, did not deny that he had written the statement, but said it was a "personal letter to the editor of *Afaq Arabiya*. I did sign my name and write my post as secretary-general of the Front," he added, but indicated that his views did not necessarily reflect the Front's official position.

After the publication of the statement, Ismail said he was surprised to receive telephone calls from several journalists, inquiring whether he considered Hanafi an infidel.

"I cannot say he is an infidel; nor should my words be taken as an invitation to kill him. I even demand his protection," Ismail said. However, he acknowledged that his aim had been to "expose Hanafi's destructive plan, so that the concerned authorities may debate his ideas or investigate him; the nation has institutions for this purpose."

Ismail said he reached his conclusions after reading two books by Hanafi, *From the Covenant to Revolution* and *Heritage and Renewal*, which, he claimed, challenged the teachings of Islam. Ismail accused Hanafi of denying the *isra'a wal mi'raj* miracle, by writing that the Prophet Mohamed did not ascend to Heaven during his lifetime, but simply had a vision. Another offence, according to Ismail, is that Hanafi wrote that "God does not exist except through our minds, meaning that by thinking we make God."

Abdel-Moetei Bayoumi, former dean of Al-Azhar's Fundamentals of Religion College, told the *Weekly* that in the course of a conversation between him and Ismail, the latter described Hanafi as an "infidel and atheist." Bayoumi said the college had invited Hanafi to deliver a lecture at the end of April, but the idea was fiercely opposed by Ismail, who based his objection on the belief that Hanafi was an "infidel and atheist, who insults God."

In Bayoumi's view, Ismail's accusations are false. The quotations from Hanafi's books "projected the thinking of the *sufis*, and not Hanafi's own ideas, and they were criticised by Hanafi in the books," Bayoumi said. As for the denial of the Prophet's ascent to heaven, Bayoumi said many scholars share the conviction that it was the Prophet's soul, rather than his body, which ascended.

Bayoumi defended Hanafi as a scholar who uses *ijtihad* (independent interpretation), "which is permitted in Islam, even if the interpretation is wrong... I sometimes agree with Hanafi and sometimes I disagree, but I cannot say that his thinking is that of an infidel."

Human rights groups have rallied to Hanafi's defence, charging that Ismail's statement has given militants the green light to kill him.

The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) described the statement as a "new setback for civil society... We fear that extremist Islamist groups will use this statement as a legal cover to assassinate Hassan Hanafi, because these groups believe it is their duty to immediately carry out the death sentence on apostates."

The Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA) expressed "condemnation of opinions such as those of the Al-Azhar Scholars Front, which can be considered as a moral liquidation of Hanafi and may very well lead to his physical liquidation.

"Intellectual disputes should not be solved through apostasy campaigns, but rather through serious dialogue in which all parties have equal opportunities to express their points of view, and where they can debate freely without fear, threat or hindrance," CHRLA said.

The two human rights groups said it was not the first time that condemnations by clerics had spurred attacks by militants on writers and intellectuals. Militants shot and killed secularist writer Farag Foda in 1992 after similar criticism of his work by the Front.

Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, a professor of Arabic literature, and his wife, Ibtihal Younes, were forced to flee Egypt in 1995 after an Islamist lawyer brought a lawsuit alleging that Abu Zeid's writings violated Islamic teachings. Early rulings in the case branded Abu Zeid an apostate, and required him to divorce his wife on the grounds that a Muslim woman cannot be married to a non-Muslim man.

Hanafi, who was on a tour outside Egypt, could not be reached for comment.

'Doomsday' storm turns day into night

A SEVERE sandstorm hit Cairo and other parts of Egypt last Friday, turning the sky an orangey-brown and then grey, reducing visibility to near zero, starting several fires and felling trees, lamp-posts and advertising billboards. The official death toll stands at 19, with 20 others injured in storm-related incidents.

The storm appeared as a huge black, red-tipped cloud to the west of Cairo, and quickly made its way across the city, plunging streets into darkness and sending people rushing for shelter. "This is Doomsday," one man shouted as he ran for cover. Although weather scientists say this week's storm was the worst in 30 years, there were few who seemed to recall anything similar. The Doomsday theory was not an uncommon, if only momentary, reaction as day was turned suddenly into night by the storm. Some later reported they had feared a nuclear explosion, and one imaginative Cairene said he went so far as to believe that Haley's Comet had struck the planet.

When the eye of the storm had passed overhead, the darkness was replaced by an eerie whiteness and winds remained high.

Officials at the Meteorological Authority said the storm, which hit Cairo at 3.30 pm, continued for over an hour and brought winds of around 100 kilometres per hour. Caused by a low pressure system, it began in the Western Desert and, after hitting Cairo, travelled east and north-east, lashing at Ismailia, Port Said and the Nile Delta. Officials at the Interior Ministry said 12 governorates, out of a total of 26, were affected.

Cairo Airport was closed and incoming flights diverted to Hurghada, along the Red Sea coast, and to Aswan in the south. Motorised traffic ground to a halt and the few motorists who braved the storm had to turn their headlights on and manoeuvre around fallen trees and billboards.

In Giza, south of Cairo, an unidentified man was killed when a satellite dish fell from the top of a building. Others were killed or injured in Cairo, Giza, Qalyubiya, Suez City, Menoufiya, Daqahliya, Gharbiya, Sharqiya, Beni Suef and Sohag by fallen masonry and trees or in traffic accidents caused by the storm. Several makeshift houses were damaged.

Power lines came crashing down, starting fires in Qalyubiya, Sharqiya and Beni Suef. A plastics factory in Qalyubiya was gutted by fire, causing losses of LE24 million, but it was not immediately clear whether the blaze and the storm were related. The tents of the national circus at Agouza and a smaller circus in Old Cairo collapsed after the poles supporting them were uprooted by the winds, but no injuries were reported.

Officials at the Meteorological Authority conceded that they had failed to predict the storm. The reason, they said, is that the Authority has no weather forecast stations in the Western Desert, where the storm originated.

Sandstorms are not unusual in spring; they sometimes accompany the strong spring *winds known as the khamasin.*

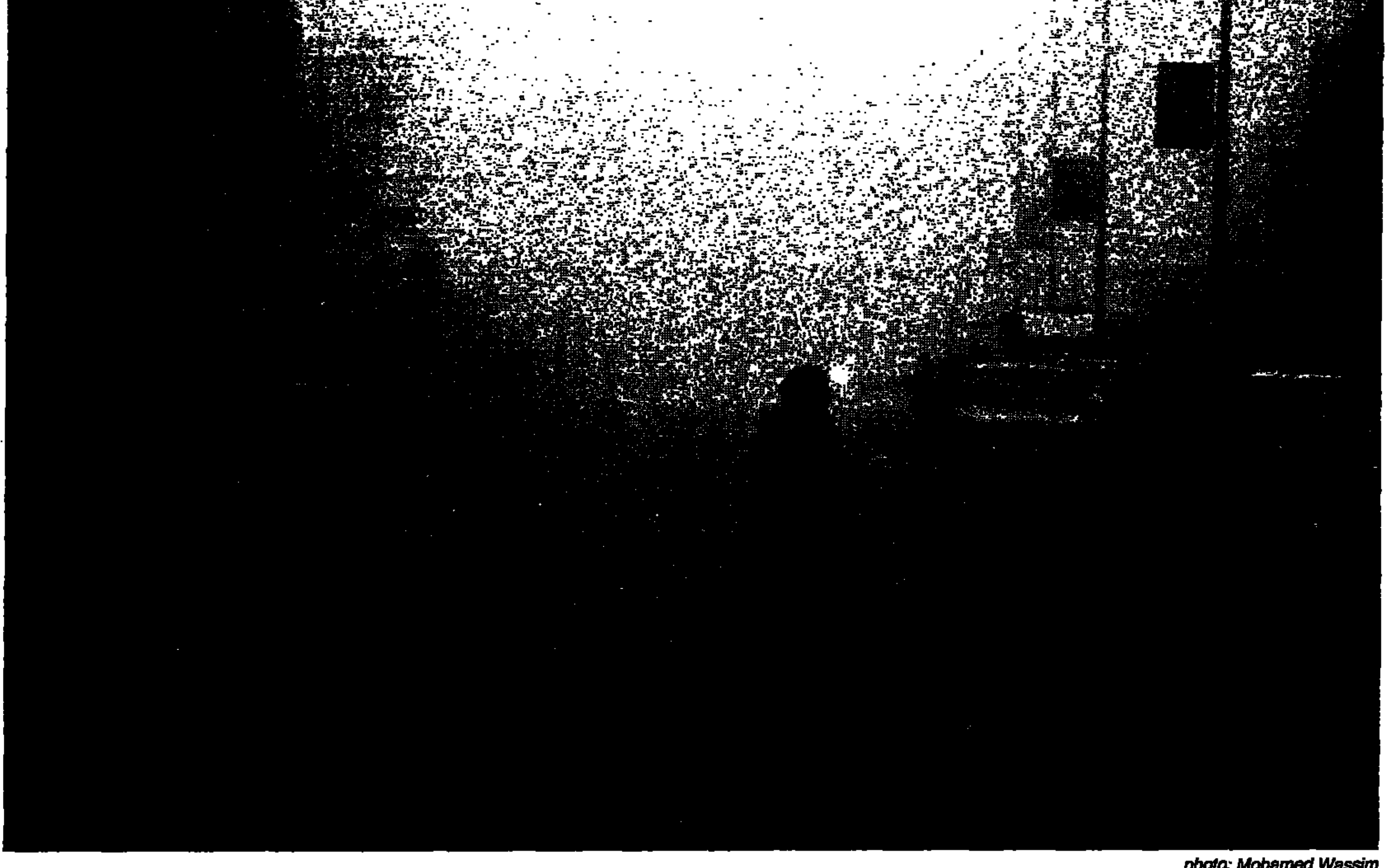


photo: Mohamed Wassim

Dispute over defining death

Doctors and Muslim theologians have finally agreed that organ transplants should be legalised, but the controversy continues as to whether a person whose brain has stopped functioning is actually dead. Shaden Shehab investigates

Tantawi

After a long delay, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, and Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy, issued separate statements last week, declaring that organ transplants are permissible in Islam under certain conditions. Sheikh Tantawi went as far as to declare his readiness to donate his organs after his death. However, one of the conditions the theologians have imposed is that the donor must be "completely dead" and "all his vital functions have come to a halt."

This has been widely interpreted as meaning that the donor's heart must have stopped before organs can be removed. But such a condition would make the transplant of organs — with the exception of corneas — impossible in real terms. Transplants are only viable when organs come from "clinically dead" patients. Clinical death is defined as occuring when the brain stops functioning, although the heart continues to beat.

The Doctors Syndicate has come out in opposition to the theologians' position. A statement issued following a meeting attended by 30 of the nation's top physicians and surgeons said that "most of those attending agreed that when the brain *stops* functioning, the person is considered dead."

The controversy continued as two laws governing transplants, one drafted by the Ministry of Health and the other by Mansoura University professors, are set to be debated in the People's Assembly soon.

Many doctors have demanded the legalisation of organ transplants. Such a move, they say, would save the lives of poorer patients, who cannot afford to travel abroad for transplant surgery. But others, previously backed by the theologians, object to the practice on the grounds that it is against religion, despite the fact that most countries, including conservative Muslim states like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, allow the removal of organs from clinically dead donors.

In addition to the proviso that the donor must be "completely dead," Tantawi's statement added that transplants should not be undertaken for material gain, meaning that the donor's family should not be paid.

Like Tantawi, the Academy said that all vital functions of the donor must have stopped, and both specified that "doctors are the ones to determine this." The Academy also said that "it is permissible to remove an organ from a dead person's body to a living person, provided the dead person has stated his readiness in his will or two of his heirs testified to his wish to do so." In the absence of a will or witnesses, a transplant operation could be performed "with the permission of the concerned authorities," the statement said. But the operation is not allowed if it involves material gain to the donor's family or if it leads to "genealogical mix-up."

The *Fatwa* and Legislation Department of the State Council has also said that organ transplants are permissible, subject to certain conditions and provided they are regulated. But it, too, said that death has not occurred if any part of the body is still functioning, insisting that "all functions and features of life must have stopped."

The Doctors Syndicate's statement, signed by its chairman, Hamdi El-Sayed, said that the group of 30 doctors had "agreed on the legality of organ transplants, provided the practice is governed by regulations." One of these regulations is that transplant operations should be confined to state-owned *hospitals, the surgeons should be highly qualified* and the operation should be affordable to all, and not only to those who can pay the cost. Violators should face fines and imprisonment, the statement said. Clinical death should be determined by three doctors — one of them a neurologist — who are not taking part in the transplant operation, the statement said.

The draft bill prepared by Health Minister Ismail *Sallam* did not provide a definition of *when death* occurs, thus skipping over the controversy of clinical death. It simply said that "the fact that death has occurred should be determined by three doctors — one of them a neurologist — who are not taking part in the transplant operation."

The draft prepared by Mansoura University professors also did not include a definition of death; however the language used clearly indicated that the writers defined "death" as clinical death.

Doctors polled by *Al-Ahram Weekly* were divided. Ahmed Shafik, a respected surgeon, said that "a person is considered 100 per cent dead when his brain stops functioning." Once this happens, he said, there is not the "slightest chance" that he will ever recover, *though he could be kept breathing with the* help of life support systems, Shafik added.

He noted that transplants from the clinically dead are permitted in countries which have a high regard for the value of human life, and argued that "religion cannot be against what is to the benefit of mankind."

Syndicate chairman El-Sayed commented that it was "a pity that Egypt, *which was a pioneer among Muslim* countries, is now facing attempts to drive it backwards."

He provided his own interpretation of the Academy's opinion: "I respect the *Academy's opinion — which is that a person is* dead when he is completely dead — since the person whose brain has stopped functioning is completely dead."

Safwat Hasan Lutfi, an anaesthetist who attended the Syndicate's meeting, disagreed. "God has informed us that life is the function of the soul; the soul initiates and maintains life and supplies the body with the warmth of life," he argued. "This warmth is the difference between a corpse and a living body. The departure of the soul from the body is manifested by a gradual progressive coolness of the body along with the cessation of the body's vital functions. Therefore, a person whose brain stopped functioning should never be considered as dead because he retains the warmth of life, which indicates the presence of the soul. Certainly, he is not a cadaver. He has a beating heart and functioning liver and kidneys."

Lutfi said that there were people in the United States who had come back to life after their brains stopped functioning.

Mamdouh Salama, a brain surgeon, agreed with Lutfi. "There is a possibility that the brain *may* be reactivated after the brain stem stops. There have been cases which were documented in international scientific studies. We cannot ignore God's will and take organs from a patient who might possibly come back to life."

Intellectuals seek more freedom

Writers, journalists and other intellectuals met last week to discuss ways of removing restrictions on the freedom of expression. Rania Khallaf was there

Intellectuals representing various cultural organisations held a conference at the Writers' Union last week to initiate a campaign for greater freedom of expression. The participating organisations included the Egyptian Intellectuals Association, the Intellectuals Front, the Press Syndicate, the Women Writers Organisation and Pen International. The meeting was the first in a series aimed at debating the problems faced by writers and intellectuals in Egypt.

"I do not need to affirm that we should fight to achieve a wider scope of freedom," Saadeddin Wahba, chairman of the Writers Union, told the gathering. "It is up to the intellectuals themselves to fight for a change in the cultural atmosphere." Literary critic Salah Fadl added that despite the great efforts made by the government in fighting Islamist militants, the extremist ideology has infiltrated many walks of life and "casts dark shadows on the future of culture."

According to Wahba, Egyptian culture will have no future as long as the state continues to hold the monopoly over the public media. To *resolve this problem*, he suggested that the media be privatised. "It is fatal to publicise one political view and ignore the others," Wahba said.

Broadcaster Hamdi Qandil disagreed, however. While expressing support for the establishment of private television channels, he warned against media privatisation. "There is no doubt that government control over television restricts *the freedom of debate on certain* issues," he said. "However, control by capitalist companies is equally dangerous." As a compromise, he suggested that a private channel be established in addition to the existing government-controlled channels, in an effort to reduce the state monopoly.

Fatma Moussa of Pen International suggested the creation of a media watch. Such a non-governmental organisation would "observe any transgressions and excessive support of the governmental point of view. This would put a sort of pressure on the government and result in a more powerful public opinion," she explained.

Lawyer Samir El-Bagouri called for a new publications law because despite the fact that the Constitution upholds the freedom of expression, "incidents of flagrant attacks on the freedom of creativity and expression have increased *during the last few years.*" He said the Penal Code contains many articles that penalise freedom of expression, thus encouraging extremist and anti-enlightenment groups to flourish.

Novelist Ibrahim Asslan rejected any sort of censorship on writers. But Baha' Taher, another *novelist, expressed the fear* that the cancellation of censorship might encourage "reactionary thought" to flourish.

The conference asked the union's Freedom of Expression committee to follow up on censorship and confiscation cases and support writers' legal and literary rights. They also invited non-governmental organisations to participate in publishing a monthly magazine that would keep a close watch on any violations of the freedom of creativity and expression. Finally, they demanded the restructuring of the Radio and Television Union to ensure that all ideological and political trends, including opposition political parties, are represented.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Erbakan feels the squeeze

The fortunes of Turkey's first Islamist premier have not been helped by rumours of a coalition break-up. As Omayma Abdel-Latif reports, the trouble has given ammunition to the Refah Party's growing list of enemies

As Turkey emerges from yet another power conflict which severly jolted the country's political scene last week, it is still mired in a political struggle that shows no sign of resolution.

While Prime Minister Necemettin Erbakan is working hard to avoid another possible showdown with the army generals, vowing to put into effect the National Security Council (MGK) recommendations on curbing the Islamic infulence inside his party, many still believe that the days of his government are numbered.

Though Erbakan had agreed last February to measures which included the closure of hundreds of Islamic schools, putting limits on religious dress and tighter control on Islamic charity foundations, he was dragging his feet on implementation, which prompted the military command to send warning signals to Turkey's first Islamic premier.

Despite the fact that a coalition break-up was averted, the crisis, according to observers, has left scars on the Refah Party ranks who show signs of simmering discontent as one of the MGK meeting's resolutions is to put Turkey's first Islamist premier and his party under the careful watch of the army generals. Turkish politics, according to Sirma Evcan, a veteran political analyst, have reached a point of no-return as the majority of Turks are "convinced that something should be done to avert the danger, but are forced to wait for the Turkish Armed Forces to guide the way."

A poll conducted last week by the English-language *Turkish Daily News* revealed stunning results. An overwhelming majority of Turks do not believe the military could administer the country any better than the civilians. The poll also showed that 72.3 per cent of the participants think that the present coalition government should be terminated and early elections called. Some voiced concern over the coming government. "Are those who will replace this government cleaner?" one pollster asked.

Some political observers lay the brunt of the blame for the deteriorating political situation in Turkey on the "media and the forces which subjected the Refah Party members to incredible provocations." For example, recently, Commander General Osman Ozbek insulted Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, the Refah Party and Saudi Arabia's King Fahd at a private meeting in Artvin. The video of his remarks was televised over and over again creating yet another uproar.

"The tone of the insults against the party are getting harsher and harsher every passing day," a Refah source told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The mass circulation newspapers are twisting the facts to a degree where the rights and wrongs become irrelevant," the source claimed. The party members, added the source, will have to exercise utmost self-restraint but this does not mean that they have to be subjected to unacceptable provocations.

The recent crisis has created strong undercurrents of resentment inside the Refah Party toward its participation in the coalition. For the first time, the issue of the RP withdrawing from the coalition has been raised among party members. Some strongly believe that the RP should quit to save the party's credibility as it is tarnished by Erbakan's continued concessions to the military and his secular partner. Meanwhile, the "modernist wing" of the party represented by State Minister Abdullah Gul argues that an election should be held without delay so as not to jeopardise the democratic regime.

Erbakan is faced with defections from his coalition partners. Two cabinet ministers from the True Path Party resigned after party leader Tansu Ciller refused to abondon her alliance with Welfare. He is likely to be faced with more defections, but this time from his own party.

The team of Aydin Menderes, son of former President Ednan Menderes and Erbakan's deputy, according to news reports, is still pushing with determination for the RP to withdraw from the government. Menderes believes that there is a "strong risk that democracy will be interrupted." In order to force the RP to withdraw from the government, Menderes and six of his friends have decided to announce to the press sometime next week their decision to resign from the RP, thereby dealing a further blow to Prime Minister Erbakan.

RP Secretary-General Oguzhan Asilturk, who represents the party's conservative wing, opposed withdrawal. He maintained that rather than adopting a stance which would make the party seem to have failed, RP members should remain in government and wait until the government is brought down by a censure motion or until the RP's partner ends the coalition.

But on its 300th day, the coalition government led by Erbakan seems to be trying to find an excuse to break itself up. The fact that no alternative government is in sight adds to the confusion. According to the constitution, if no new government is formed within 45 days, the president may dissolve the government and order a general election in 90 days. In such a case, a three-month interim government would be formed by the president in order to stage elections.

In fact, President Suleiman Demirel himself has publicly called for early elections several times. This was described by analysts as a civil coup against Refah that would keep Turkey's democracy unscathed. "Many of the anti-Refah supporters believe that the ten-month-old experience in power has weakened the Refah Party and its credibility and made it lose its voter base," said Evcan. According to him, the trouble with the RP is that its concept of government begins and ends with keeping power.

Turkey's top military commanders, on the other hand, have ruled out any possibility of a military intervention. Chief of General Staff General Ismail Hakki Karadayi denied the military coup allegations by saying that the Turkish Armed Forces are out of domestic politics. "No one should pull the military into internal political disputes," he told a news conference. He warned, however, that no one would remain silent about what he described as "some sensitive developments happening in Turkey which create disturbance in the public as well as in the Turkish military." He added, "Those who want a totalitarian Islamic state should be monitored and obstructed without discrimination."

While some observers paint a bleak scenario of the future in Turkey, others believe that a "national consensus government formed within the existing parliament, which in due course will take the country to elections, is the only solution compatible with democracy." A military intervention to oust the Refah from power is not what many political observers wish to see as a settlement to the current power conflict.

"People may well be frustrated with the democratic process, yet they have to be aware that the pro-Islamic Welfare Party did not come to power on its own. It capitalised on the mistakes of other mainstream parties," Ilnur Cevik, Turkey's top commentator, wrote on the recent crisis. He believes that since the democratic process has brought the Refah to power, if the party makes mistakes, then the same process — the democratic process — will eliminate it in the appropriate manner. "If we try to remove Refah from power through clandestine methods, we are bound to create a more complicated situation which may well be hard for anyone to handle, and that includes the military," Cevik added.

"The picture in Turkey is one of desperation and anger," one commentator told the *Weekly*. Those who are running the country, those who want to run it and those who wield power should, as the observer puts it, do some soul searching to find a solution to the current bleak situation. "That means a change in the system but how soon will this change come about?"

Threatening manoeuvres

SEVERAL Arab capitals have expressed their deep concern over the increasing military ties between Turkey and Israel and argue that such close links could undermine security in the region, reports **Dina Ezzat**.

Recent reports on newly scheduled joint military manoeuvres in the Mediterranean between Turkey, Israel and the United States have drawn much criticism in the Arab world.

This week, Esmat Abdel-Meguid, secretary general of the Arab League, said that Turkey needs to take into consideration the impact of such a move on its Arab neighbours.

"There are so many questions that would have to be answered in this respect," said Amr Moussa, Egyptian minister of Foreign Affairs. If this exercise is meant as a message "of certain connotations" to the Arabs, Moussa added, then it would certainly be a cause for concern.

The minister asserted that if these manoeuvres really take place the concerned Arab parties will have to react. He added that this matter has been discussed and will be further considered by the concerned parties.

The reported impending manoeuvres are supposed to be the culmination of the growing ties between Turkey and Israel launched last year with the signing of a pact for military cooperation that was subject to a strong wave of criticism from the Arab world.

News about the planned manoeuvres re-surfaced after the Turkish minister of defence visited the occupied Golan Heights while on a visit to Israel.

Syria criticised the tripartite alignment between Ankara, Tel Aviv and Washington as a threat to the stability of the region in general and the security of Iran and Syria in particular.

Al-Baath, a leading Syrian newspaper, has argued that the closeness between Turkey and Israel can only encourage Israel to pursue the expansionist policies that are threatening peace in the Middle East.

News of the tripartite manoeuvre came amid Syrian reports that Israel is making covert military threats against Damascus.

Egypt has repeatedly affirmed that military actions against any Arab state can only destroy the peace process.

Turkish President Suleiman Demirel was supposed to visit Cairo last month for talks on this matter, but, so far, that visit has not been officially scheduled. Earlier this week Moussa said that Cairo "would welcome" President Demirel.

Talabani slams Baghdad 'dictatorship'

An Iraqi Kurdish leader visited Cairo this week, hoping to enlist its moral and political support. Dina Ezzat reports

Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), met with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa during a visit to Cairo this week and said the removal of the Baghdad "dictatorship" was the solution to Iraq's problems.

"We are aspiring for Egypt's moral and political support, as a first step," Talabani said following his talks with Moussa on Sunday. "We hope that in the future we can get more than that." Talabani, whose group is one of the two main Kurdish factions in northern Iraq, said the Kurds were fully behind Iraq's territorial integrity. "We are against any and all plots that aim at dismembering Iraq. We are all for the national unity of Iraq," he said.

Talabani's visit came weeks after a delegation from the rival Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) held similar talks with Egyptian officials. "We have been wanting to come to Cairo for a long time and when our visit received the green light we came along," Talabani said.

Both the PUK and the KDP share control of the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq where some four million Iraqi-Kurds are living. After the second Gulf War in 1991, the US took a unilateral decision — not included in any of the United Nations resolutions on the matter — to declare northern Iraq a no-fly zone.

According to one source close to the Iraqi opposition, the KDP-PUK struggle is often fueled by neighbouring countries. Turkey, for example, fears that a strong Kurdish-Iraqi presence could set an example that the Kurdish-Turks may want to follow. Moreover, the source added, Iran has often tried to use the KDP-PUK clash to rein in both parties and allow itself a strong leverage in the north of Iraq. Iran is known to favour the PUK.

While in Cairo last week, the leader of the PUK condemned Turkish incursions into northern Iraq, in hot pursuit of Kurdish insurgents, declaring that any action by Turkey to defend its security should be confined to its own territory and not spill over into neighbouring states. "Turkey has the right to have a security belt on its territories but not on Iraqi territories," Talabani said. Turkey has been trying for more than a decade to crush activists of the leftist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). The PKK claims to represent Turkish Kurds. PKK fighters often take refuge on Iraqi territory to escape Turkish troops.

Talabani, whose group is seeking self-rule for the Kurds of northern Iraq, said Iraq's territorial unity was not threatened by the Kurds but by the "dictatorship" in Baghdad. "We believe that the problems of Iraq could only be solved through democracy. We are calling for a democratic, multi-party, federal Iraq," he said. Only a democratic regime will be able to lay to rest Iraq's ethnic problems, Talabani added.

Democratising Iraq, he said, "can only be achieved by the removal of the dictatorship in Baghdad." Talabani made it clear that by "dictatorship" he did not only refer to President Saddam Hussein but to his entire regime. Overthrowing the Baghdad government can be done "through the cooperation of all Iraqi people, those who are inside the country and those who are outside it," and "with regional and international help and support." Talabani added that he "welcomed" statements by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, calling for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government.

For his part, Moussa said that Cairo's interest in the Kurdish problem is long-standing. "We have always been interested in all issues that affect the Arab world, including the Kurdish problem," he said. "We should not forget that when we talk about northern Iraq, we are talking about Iraq, and Iraq is an important Arab state. The situation in Iraq is on the agenda of our interests." According to Moussa, Talabani's visit to Cairo was part of a "series of contacts" Egypt is undertaking with all parties concerned with the situation in northern Iraq.

The reactivation of the Egyptian interest in northern Iraq should convey to Washington the message that Egypt will always remain a leading country in the region, an Egyptian diplomat said. Cairo's renewed interest in having contacts with the Kurdish leader comes at a time when Turkey has intensified its military cooperation with Israel.

Talabani's visit to Cairo coincided with a visit by Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign minister of neighbouring Iran. Last week in Tehran, the PUK signed a peace deal with the Iraqi Kurdish Islamic movement to end their mutual clashes and help restore minimum stability to northern Iraq.

Egyptian officials declined to say if they discussed the situation in northern Iraq with the visiting Iranian delegation.

Labour's clean sweep

Tony Blair, leader of the Labour Party, surprised even himself by winning the largest ever Labour majority in parliament. Jasim Al-Azzawi analyses the British election results

This century's longest epoch of Tory rule came to a screeching halt when the revamped New Labour Party trounced the Conservatives after 18 years of desperate search. for a delicate blend of pragmatic policies and charismatic leadership. Out of 659 seats in the House of Commons, Labour won 418, *its largest majority* ever this century. This is the kind of majority that will help Labour carry out its popular mandate and legislation.

For most dissatisfied Britons, the election was *long* overdue and the outcome was clearly in favour of the camp of the new comeback kid leader, Tony Blair. But why should that be so? If, according to time-honoured political wisdom, victory follows in the trail of a robust economy, why did the Conservatives lose considering that since 1992 the British GDP has grown by 11 per cent and the number of unemployed fallen by more than 700,000? The answer lies *in an American-style, carefully* orchestrated Labour strategy designed to shed its old pernicious, socialist tax-and-spend image; dispel memories of projectionist Labour governments; shift to the right of centre of the political spectrum; and marshal its attack on Prime Minister John Major's economic policies at every turn.

During the unusually long election campaign, Labour *questioned the wisdom of the government's* monetarism, medium-term financial strategy and the impact on Britain of its policy of shadowing the German mark. However, all this pales in comparison to the political devastation suffered by the Tories on Black Wednesday, 16 September 1992, when the sterling tumbled out of the exchange-rate-mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System. *In a flash, the Conservatives lost their* cherished mystical aura of financial savvy. Labour, smelling blood, leapt to the offensive and charged its political foes with ruinous economic incompetence and wasting North Sea oil revenues. Blair and his lieutenants cleverly manipulated figures to encapsulate the Conservatives' shortcomings. They underscored Britain's plunge down the World Bank's *world-prosperity league table* from *13th place* in 1979 to 18th in 1994.

Surprisingly, as election time neared, the visible and vociferous disarray within the Tory government's ranks over its policy vis-à-vis Europe caused Prime Minister Major the most political damage. Despite the fact that Major had previously called for Britain to be "at the heart of Europe", the Conservatives have pro*claimed themselves opposed to the evolution of* the European Union towards a federal-style state.

The quarrelsome Eurosceptics within the Conservative Party, portraying themselves as representatives of a wide public fearful of an overweening Brussels bureaucracy, publicly undermined Major's authority and provided Labour with desperately-needed political ammunition to *highlight the split in the Conservative* ranks. Encouraged by progressive continental policies on workers' rights and social standards, Labour, in sharp contrast, adopted a pro-European position. The social chapter of the Maastricht Treaty proved a contentious dividing litmus test. Labour stressed its intention of rejoining the social chapter of the EU and signaled its flexibility for an extension of qual*ified majority* voting and role expansion of the European Parliament.

In stark contrast to previous elections, foreign affairs and defence issues failed to captivate the voters' attention. These issues were instead relegated to sparring debates among party experts, primarily because only cognoscenti could have spotted the fine line of disagreement. Both sides view NATO as the cornerstone of their *defence policies*. But the Conservatives intend to bar Russia from having veto power over the acceptance of new members into the alliance, while Labour supports NATO expansion eastward if it is coupled with steps to include Russia in a wider security framework. Both are vehemently against proposals for a Euro-army as well as the creation of NATO's Allied Rapid *Reaction Corps. Labour supports the Western* European Union as the European arm of NATO.

The new Labour government inherited substantial foreign-policy assets that empower the little island to wield a disproportionate influence in diplomatic, military and commercial realms. In addition to its membership in NATO and the Group of Seven industrial powers, Blair's government will be drawing on its strong traditional relations with the US and its position as one of the five veto-wielding seats on the UN's Security Council.

In their hustings, Labour candidates were diligent in pointing out that "defence and security" assessment reviews do not undermine British commitments and constitute no future defence cuts.

Labour had pledged British involvement in UN peacekeeping operations but intends to propose a series of practical political and financial reforms of the world body. Labour publicised its coherent strategic framework to eliminate $5 billion in military waste and create a Defence *Diversification Agency to assist defence firms* and communities in moving from military fields to civilian-oriented markets.

Having abandoned its troublesome unilateral nuclear disarmament past, Labour would not scrap its Trident submarines, but limit their carrying capacity to 48 warheads each. Notwithstanding Labour's criticism of "treasury-driven cuts in defence spending", the new gov*ernment will be under pressure from its own* backbenchers to spend closer to the European average of 2.3 per cent of GDP.

The new Labour government will emphasise rapidly deployable forces at the expense of heavy armour and is keen to build on air force military cooperation with France and develop the Anglo-Dutch amphibious force. But in the post-Cold War reality of shrinking military ex*penditures, Labour will be hard pressed to keep* its promise of stringent arms controls that bar arms sales to repressive regimes.

"We will continue to work with international partners to secure peace and stability in areas of tension such as former Yugoslavia, Kashmir, Cyprus and the Middle East." This was the extent of the Labour Party's manifesto's reference to the Middle East in contrast to detailed state*ments by senior cabinet members, including* Major and Foreign Minister Rifkind vis-à-vis the Middle East peace process. The latter, who lost his seat, commented: "To last, the settlement will need to respect basic Palestinian rights, not least the right to self-determination. To close off the option of a state would in my view be a mistake of the first magnitude."

Political experts foresee a continuation of Brit*ain's Middle East policy of shadowing the US* and counterbalancing the independent French attitude that seeks to garner a greater role to influence the final outcome of the peace talks.

"Britain will continue to support US efforts. But our role will not be to just support." Even though these words were uttered by Rifkind, Britain was compelled to steer away from the US on two recent crucial UN Security Council resolution votes against Israeli plans to build a new settlement in East Jerusalem.

If history is a reliable compass, Britain's policy towards the Middle East is not likely to change significantly and close attention to American interests will be the vital wink for Blair in 10 Downing Street.

The writer is a London-based Iraqi political commentator and political coordinator of MBC, the Arab satellite television network.



After having deeply buried the Tories at the polls in a landslide victory for Labour last week, a triumphant Tony Blair beams at a cheering crowd. "For 18 years... my party has been in opposition. It could only say, it could not do...Today, enough of talking — it is time now to do", said Blair as he prepared to take up residence at 10 Downing Street *(photo: AFP)*

New box of US tricks?

As Mobutu's reign draws to a close, Washington is setting its sights on doing business with Kabila, preferably after the rebel leader's wings have been clipped, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

The moment of truth for Zaire is almost at hand. Forget last Sunday's meeting between Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seku and the leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) Laurent Desiré Kabila aboard the South African warship, the Outeniqua, anchored off the Congolese port of Pointe Noire. The meeting was arranged under the auspices of South African President Nelson Mandela. Nothing consequential came out of it. In fact, it was an embarrassment in more ways than one.

To begin with, Kabila kept Mandela waiting aboard the ship for two days — an *affront* to which Mandela did not take kindly. Not to be outdone, Mobutu stubbornly refused to step down even as Kabila's forces were closing in on the Zairean capital Kinshasa.

The *United* States, for its part, has serious misgivings about Kabila because of his involvement in the armed Marxist rebellion that tore Zaire apart in 1964-65. The US ambassador to Zaire, Daniel Simpson, and 38 American Embassy employees remain in Kinshasa but the vast majority of the estimated 500 American citizens residing in Zaire have been hurriedly evacuated to neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, Bill Richardson, Washington's special envoy to Zaire and ambassador to the United Nations, stood aghast *as the Zairean pro*tagonists performed a comical Punch and Judy show. Richardson's mission was to persuade Mobutu to step down gracefully and to get Kabila to acquiesce to the holding of free and fair elections and to share power with the Zairean opposition forces that did not take part in the fighting. Kabila is unlikely to accept such suggestions.

"This is a historic occasion that hopefully will lead to a peaceful transition in Zaire. There are no preconditions," Richardson told reporters in Kinshasa. The problem is that nobody believes that there are no preconditions. Everyone assumes that the US has a hidden agenda that includes clipping *Kabila's wings*. Richardson is an old Africa hand. Last year, he successfully negotiated the release of aid workers who were abducted by a pro-government southern Sudanese faction.

However, the US cannot convince Zaire's neighbours that Kabila and Mobutu are much of a muchness. The Zairean people, too, refuse to believe that Kabila is as bad as Mobutu. There are reports that Angola is amassing troops in the Cabinda enclave which lies within striking distance from Kinshasa. The US has warned Angola not to get involved in the fighting in Zaire.

Eritrea *and Ethiopia* are *miffed at Zaire's inability to* stop Sudanese government-backed breakaway southern Sudanese factions from using the 500km-long undefended Zairean-Sudanese border as a springboard to attack Sudan People's Liberation Army positions in southern Sudan. There is evidence that President Mobutu collaborated with Sudan and turned a blind eye to pro-Khartoum breakaway SPLA groups' incursions into northeastern Zaire. Anti-Ugandan government groups also use Zairean territory to hit government targets inside Uganda.

Rwanda, too, holds a grudge against Mobutu for aiding and abetting the former Rwandan government and assisting it in the genocide of ethnic Tutsi. After the fall *of the rump* Rwandan regime, Mobutu helped the perpetrators of the atrocities to flee Rwanda. He gave them shelter in eastern Zaire where they mingled with the hapless Rwandan refugees, wreaking havoc in the refugee camps and instituting a reign of terror. For Mobutu, the Rwandan refugees were cannon fodder in wars with neighbouring Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. These refugees are *paying a heavy* price today.

There is little love lost between Kabila and Washington, but the former Marxist *guerrilla* knows that he has to do business with Washington. Most Western observers believe that Kabila is prepared to go through the motions of getting to know the Americans better.

For love or money, there is little that can be done at this late hour about Washington's mistrust of Kabila. Even as he stands triumphantly poised to capture Kinshasa, Kabila is walking the tightrope. The ex-Marxist's adoption of World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies might strengthen Kabila's hand at the negotiating table — *not with Mobutu, but with* the Americans.

As an indication of the rules by which Kabila should play once he is in power, US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin announced last week that the international community had to find new ways to assist African countries that have adopted radical economic reform programmes. Rubin disclosed that the Clinton administration was working closely with the American Congress to introduce measures permitting increased access to US markets by African countries that have embarked *on deregulatory and economic liberalisation pro*grammes. He was also examining debt relief measures for reformed countries and the "more imaginative use of [US] trade and investment promotion programmes."

Rubin welcomed the decision by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to make Uganda the first beneficiary of a $338 million debt relief programme. Under the leadership of President Yoweri Museveni, Uganda embarked on a 10-year economic reform pro*gramme at the end of the East* African country's civil war in 1986. Today, Uganda has one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. Museveni has been demanding that Uganda and other poor and reforming African countries should be given greater access to world markets.

Next month, the IMF will decide if the two West African Francophone countries of Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso will be*come the next beneficiaries of the* special debt relief programme. There is a consensus among the largest industrially advanced nations — the G7 — that countries implementing reforms and vigorously combating poverty should benefit from debt relief plans.

Moussa on African tour

DURING a five-day African tour last week, the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs, Amr Moussa, promoted the bolstering of economic ties between Egypt and four African neighbours.

Accompanied by a fairly large delegation of prominent Egyptian businessmen, Moussa *visited* Djibouti, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. The delegation met with African officials and businessmen to discuss future projects which could be implemented using Egyptian funds and expertise. Potential up-scaling of exports and imports between Egypt and the four countries was also discussed.

Moussa recalled that in the 1950s Egypt had played a prominent role in supporting the liberation of the African countries. By initiating the new projects Egypt was "successfully expanding its economic *cooperation with its African* neighbours", he said.

In Uganda, Moussa and the Ugandan president gave the go-ahead to the establishment of a large industrial zone in Uganda that would accommodate big Egyptian investment.

Discussions of the current *political situation in the continent* were also on Moussa's agenda. He delivered messages from President Hosni Mubarak to the Ugandan and Kenyan presidents.

Back to Cairo on Saturday, Moussa reported that his trip had been successful.

China in Africa

CHINESE Premier Li Peng began a 10-day African tour on Monday which will take him to Zambia, Mozambique, Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria and Tanzania.

Li's entourage includes the minister of foreign trade and economic cooperation, Wu Yi, the minister in charge of the state commission for economic restructuring, Li Tieying, and a host of top-level officials, businessmen and diplomats.

China hopes to rally African support for *its stand against* what it sees as Western, and particularly American, interference in Chinese domestic affairs. "China and Africa have further increased their consultations in international affairs," Li told reporters in Beijing just before he left on his tour. He stressed that there has been a qualitative shift in Chinese aid to African countries.

Both China and Africa have embarked on radical economic reform programmes and are liberalising their economies, Li said. "The Chinese government encourages Chinese enterprises to cooperate directly with African enterprises; it supports Chinese companies investing in Africa and the expansion of the sphere *of economic* cooperation," he added.

Li's visit to Africa is expected to strengthen ties already cemented during last year's visit to several African countries by Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

South Africa, which is not on Li's itinerary, announced a *couple of months ago that it* intends to sever relations with Taiwan.

Press freedom award

THE first UNESCO-Cano World Press Freedom Prize was *officially presented to* imprisoned Chinese journalist Gao Yu on 3 May at a ceremony marking the celebration of World Press Freedom Day in the Basque-Spanish city of Bilbao.

The $25,000 cheque was handed to Timothy Balding, the director of Fiej, the organisation *that had nominated* Gao Yu. Balding read a moving message thanking UNESCO on behalf of Gao Wu.

Unfortunately for Gao Yu, the Chinese authorities seem determined to obtain the annulment of the award on the grounds that it was illegal.

Beijing argued that UNESCO's Director-General Federico Mayor had no authority to give the award to a Chinese "criminal". It said UNESCO's decision was an "intrusion" into China's internal affairs.

Annan on reform tour

LAST Monday, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan left for The Hague on his way to Russia, China, Japan and Austria to pursue his efforts to garner political support for UN reforms. Aides say that Annan will also focus on international issues such as the conflict in Zaire during his five-nation swing, which winds up in Vienna on 20 May.

In The Hague, Annan was keynote speaker at a UN conference on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Russian officials say that Annan's visit is expected to boost the UN role in settling conflicts in the Commonwealth of Independent States, the loose grouping of 12 former Soviet republics.

At the end of the two-week tour, Annan will have visited the capitals of all five UN permanent members since taking office on 1 January this year.



Egypt's export dilemma

An export-oriented economy is not made by mere legislative tools and a more efficient bureaucracy. It is, argues Shafik Gabr, a process and a culture, and these must be planned

A buyer in Switzerland prefers to import leather bags and briefcases at three to four times the price he would have paid had he opted for Egyptian leather goods. When asked why, the buyer responded, "Never again from Egypt. When I placed my first sample order, it was excellent. However, the next three shipments were late, substandard, came in the wrong colours and were unequal in quality."

Does this mean Egypt can't do quality work? Of course not. Egypt has many shining examples of export quality manufactured goods, notably *textiles, ceramics and furniture.* Similarly, in the services sector, architecture, engineering and tourism stand out, to name just a few. Yet the *nation still has an export problem.*

When many government officials, economists and businessmen speak of Egyptian exports, they call for the removal of bureaucratic impediments, for the mitigation of transaction costs, for the expansion of government subsidies, and so forth. While some items on this list of recommendations, such as subsidies, should be ignored and others, such as removing red tape, should be heeded, these suggestions do little to get to the heart of the matter. Moreover, no such recommendations will be useful so long as we fail to ignore the obvious — that there is a fundamental lack of planning and follow-up in the export process.

Too many observers see exports only at the point of transaction between buyer and seller rather than as a process. For Egyptian exports to grow substantially, and have a real, positive impact on growth, several facts must be recognised. First, export is a culture and not a transaction. Second, export requires discipline, not the ideology of "*maalesh*" (never mind), and "*bukra, inshallah*" (tomorrow, God willing). Third, export requires creativity and flexibility within a framework of excellence and reliability. Fourth, export is marketing, which means determining the buyers' needs and providing service beyond the call of duty. Finally, export is not only today's products, but also tomorrow's. This means that heavy investment must be injected in research and development.

The export process, therefore, is not merely the transaction, but a series of steps beginning with product development and leading up to after-sale service and follow-ups.

When talking to an Egyptian exporter of auto components about changing the specs for a North African buyer, his response was, "The buyer should buy what I produce and not what he is asking for." As if to confirm his point, he added, "France buys it."

Given the definition of exports, this is entirely the wrong attitude. The right attitude is to focus on the points above. Underlying all are the common denominators of all successful ventures: *credibility and discipline.*

The writer is president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt.

Investment law under investors' fire

A new investment law, which has been sharply criticised by MPs and businessmen alike was, nonetheless, approved with an overwhelming majority in parliament. Gamal Essam El-Din reports on the parliamentary debate, while Mona El-Fiqi reports on businessmen's reactions

Although finally approved by an overwhelming majority in the People's Assembly, the government's new Investment Guarantees and Incentives Law came under fire from several MPs and businessmen. The 47-article law aims at boosting production and foreign direct investments in Egypt by providing a generous package of investment guarantees and incentives. Under the new law, investors will be able to enjoy such perks as extended tax exemptions, protection against sequestration, nationalisation and the expropriation of assets and industries.

The law, however, was described by some MPs as negatively affecting many of the existing investment incentives and granting the government excessive power in allocating tax exemptions. In addition, several opposition and NDP parliamentarians argued that not only were some of the law's most important articles vague, but that at least three were unconstitutional.

Among the most vocal opponents of the new law was Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party. Mohieddin criticised the law for "providing equal incentives for all kinds of projects, regardless of their function."

"How can I offer equal tax exemptions to a potato chip project and an industrial project," he queried. "Placing both these kinds of projects on par is due to the philosophy behind the law, which is based on the assumption that tax exemptions are the most important incentives and stimuli for attracting investments."

The leftist MP also leveled criticism against the law for stipulating that no company will be subject to mandatory pricing. "Even in the most economically liberalised countries, services such as electricity and drainage systems, which are provided to companies, are subject to mandatory pricing by authorities," explained Mohieddin.

The strongest attack against the law came from Ayman Nour, a member of the liberal New Wafd Party. Nour argued that "contrary to popular belief, the incentives and guarantees granted under this law are not generous enough."

"In fact, it [the law] negatively affects investment incentives and privileges already granted to a number of projects," he continued. "For example, the law strips land reclamation projects of their present 10-year tax exemption period, and takes away from low-cost and rent-based housing projects their current 15-year tax exemption."

Further compounding matters, he claimed, was the fact that the new legislation clearly violates article 119 of the constitution, which stipulates that the levying of or exemption from taxes can be imposed only through specific legislation. "Articles 4 and 27 of the new law, however, give the prime minister the power to determine the basic rules for tax exemptions," stated Nour. "Not only does this violate the constitution, but it also strips parliament of its exclusive right to pass tax laws."

Also topping Nour and a group of business MPs' lists of complaints was that the law, for no discernible reason, seeks to replace the General Investment Authority (GIA) at a later stage with a yet-to-be-determined administrative authority. The GIA is responsible for licensing investment projects. Some deputies are speculating that a new ministry for investment affairs may be established to *take the place of the GIA.*

Joining forces with Nour was Sameh Ashour, the only Nasserist Party MP in parliament. Ashour maintained that the law violated the constitution by giving investors too many special privileges at the expense of other citizens. "In Article 6, the law prohibits the filing of any criminal suits against investors until the concerned administrative authority, which is to replace the GIA, has been given 15 days to voice its opinion on the charges," he pointed out. "Why should we place an obstacle in the way of the filing of lawsuits against investors?" he asked. "Will this not give foreign investors a form of unconstitutional immunity and provide them *with ample time to escape from Egypt* before any action is taken against them?"

But explaining the government's position on these issues, Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib noted that the new law not only brings under one banner all existing investment incentives laws, but also brings Egypt's investment legislation in line with the latest international standards.

While the finance minister emphasised that the law seeks to eventually replace the GIA — after a transition period — with a new administrative body, this does not mean that its present role will be phased out.

"The GIA will remain specifically responsible for promoting investment projects and attracting foreign investors to Egypt," said El-Gharib. Moreover, he *added that* the law protects investors from mandatory pricing for their products, "because this has proven to be one of the most essential and effective incentives in attracting foreign investors to Egypt."

The criticism of the law was not restricted to the parliament. Lambasting the law, some businessmen have argued that it reduces investment incentives in the new industrial cities and fails to reduce customs on capital goods.

Touching on the latter point, Ahmed Arafa, head of the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce's (EFCC) *investment division, was blunt.* "*Law 203 of* 1989 sets customs duties on capital goods at five per cent," he stated. "Given that all other Arab and European countries do not *levy any taxes on* capital goods, this figure is excessive." While the new law does not tackle this problem, reducing the tax to one per cent, for example, would be a compromise that, within the framework of GATT, leaves Egyptian products competitive with foreign goods.

Taking the businessmen's arguments to another level, Sherif Dellawer, of the Alexandria Businessmen's Association (ABA), argued that this law should not have even been issued. It is, he said, a carbon copy of the law currently on the books, with the only real difference being that it reduces the privileges offered for investment in the new industrial cities.

"The new articles in the law are so few that it would have been better if the changes had been made to the current law," said Dellawer.

Prior to the passing of the law, the ABA had prepared a report detailing its objec*tions to the proposed* legislation. First and foremost, the ABA had maintained that the copy of the draft law submitted to it by the Ministry of Public Enterprise was completely different from that which was approved by the PA.

"The copy sent to the ABA states that all commercial, individual or civil companies listed in the commercial records will be able to take advantage of the new investment guarantees and incentives," recalled Dellawer. "The law passed by the Assembly, however, limits tax exemptions to projects listed in article one of the law."

New business bills in the pipeline

The government has referred to the People's Assembly a new batch of *economic bills aimed at facilitating* investment procedures and increasing production rates. Gamal Essam El-Din followed the debate

The People's Assembly last week received a list of new economic bills aimed at speeding up investment procedures and helping investors cope with recent economic policy changes. The list of bills presented to the Assembly is part and parcel of the government's drive to bring about legislative reform as a means of creating a more investor-friendly business environment for the next century.

Topping the list of these long-awaited bills is an IMF-inspired bill entitled, "the Regulation of the Bidding Procedures Law". The bill, which is an amendment of Law 9 of 1983, aims at bringing legislation up to speed with the recent economic developments in project implementation and eliminating a host of procedures currently confronted by public-sector agencies and private entrepreneurs when submitting bidding and tender offers for *national projects. The bill* applies to all state administrative agencies and national service and economic organisations.

Following a cabinet meeting last week, Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif indicated that the bill attaches special im*portance to a contractors ability* to successfully undertake the project in awarding bidding contracts. To this end, the competitive base is widened to include private bidders, as well as public sector enterprises.

"The new bill provides private and public bidders equal opportunities to submit bids for the government projects and the provision of services," said El-Sherif. The government views this as a major step forward given that businessmen maintain that the current law discriminates against private entrepreneurs in the bidding process.

The existing bidding procedures law, argued Mohamed Abul-Enein, a prominent businessman and MP, is based on awarding public contracting firms government projects, regardless of how efficient they really are. "The present bidding system awards bids in light of cost criteria, regardless of the efficiency of the contractors," he said.

The new bill, added El-Sherif, also sanctions the system of direct contracting in such operations as providing services, purchasing equipment and implementation of transport projects (provided that the value per operation does not exceed LE40,000 — a 100 per cent increase from the level allowed under the existing law). *It also raises the value of direct* contracting for the purchase of goods monopolised by foreign agencies from the current level *of LE8,000 to* LE250,000. Direct contracting, which is not part of the current law, said El-Sherif, is a major step aimed at speeding up investment project contracting procedures.

Next on the list of new economic bills is a legislative amendment of the sales tax. The amendment aims to eliminate a 10 per cent sales tax on capital goods such as industrial equipment and machinery, with the objective of reducing the cost of industrial production and project implementation. The amendment's explanatory note states that the bill will also lead to a 20 per cent reduction in the fair market price of a number of capital goods (either imported or locally produced goods). It also enables industrial producers to claim the value of the sales tax they had previously paid on capital goods.

Complementing the above law, is another draft law tackling the establishment of companies. Known as the Unified Companies Bill, this piece of legislation was submitted by the government to the Assembly this week. The long-awaited bill is a first-of-its-kind in Egypt, unifying all previous laws governing companies and *investment projects* in order to reduce red-tape and encourage investors to launch new enterprises. It overrides as many *as 15 existing investment laws,* including Public Sector Law 203 of 1991. The bill also includes a special chapter on *companies that are 100 per cent* state-owned.

On the whole, the new legislation seeks to govern all kinds of companies, regardless of their legal status (i.e. joint stock, limited liability). It also introduces a new type of company, the One Man Project Company, as well as a new system of corporate amalgamations and mergers.

The government also submitted to the Assembly last week two draft laws on the government's national budget for fiscal year 1996-97 and the new five-year national development plan for the period from 1997-2002.

According to Planning Minister Zafer El-Bishry, the new five year plan is aimed at raising the national growth rate to around 7 per cent in 2002, up from its present level of 4.5 per cent, by boosting the economy's competitive capacity and the volume of national investments.

The plan, which is estimated to cost LE400 billion, devotes LE58 billion in fiscal 1996-97 to raising productivity and investment rates in different sectors and implementing a number of giant projects.

El-Bishry said that the private sector will be responsible for implementing 63 per cent of the targeted investments in the plan's first year. These investments *include* the implementation of a number of development projects in Sinai, Upper Egypt and the New Valley, he said.

The role of private investments is expected to increase through the plan's five year duration to reach 80 per cent in 2002. "This falls in line with the government's push to privatise companies and deregulate public sector monopolies," stated El-Bishri.

Imported lessons

Mona Qassem looks into the reasons why Egypt's exports in no way match its export potential

Despite Egypt's colossal export potential, the country's balance of trade deficit in October 1996 stood at $808.05 million. This figure, given the recent efforts at promoting economic growth, with particular emphasis on export development, is striking and raises the question: Why has Egypt been unable to realise the level of growth attained by many Asian and Latin American countries.

While these "tigers'" natural and human resource base, along with their geographical location, is no better than that of Egypt, their rate of growth is, in a large part, a result of the introduction of comprehensive development policies aimed at upgrading economic performance and, subsequently, exports. These policies seek to make all forms of economic activity export-oriented. The first step in this process has been the full liberalisation of the economy, trade and exchange rate. The next step was to implement privatisation programmes, shift assets into private hands and, therefore, increase their export opportunities and competitive capacity.

The Egyptian government began implementing similar steps in the 1990s. However, the measures have, to date, not been able to reverse the country's export deficit — a problem that has its roots in the years that followed the nationalisation drive which characterised the 1960s. This trend of the '60s extended public sector control of the production sector and, consequently, its domination of pricing policies. Similarly, the *subsidisation of prices affected* efficiency levels in all industrial sectors, leading to *inefficient* production methods and low quality goods.

During the 1970s, Egypt introduced a policy change in the form of import substitution, which meant that most of its production facilities were focused on producing goods previously imported. This policy, however, left the export production sector grossly neglected. Moreover, the trade protectionism pursued by the government during this decade to protect local production undermined research and development efforts and the importance of quality in manufacturing.

Even until the beginning of the 1990s, the few industries that were able to avoid these pitfalls eventually suffered from the absence of any export promotion policies, such as tax incentives, as well as complicated export procedures and the high cost of freight and transportation services.

Another major factor contributing to the weakening of the export sector was the state's heavy reliance on non-export foreign currency resources such as tourism, Suez Canal revenues and cash remittances from Egyptian expatriate workers. Also factoring into the equation was the government's lack of awareness of the importance of foreign market analysis as a means of boosting the competitive edge of some key Egyptian industries.

These shortcomings created an economic domino effect of sorts. Egypt's inability to promote its industry abroad reduced the willingness of foreign investors to channel their capital into the country. This, in turn, meant that foreign investments did not play a main role in enhancing Egypt's export sector, which was still plagued by a number of problems resulting from long years of government intervention.

Now on the threshold of a new millennium, and as a signatory or participant in a number of major economic agreements, the Egyptian government is upgrading the performance of the export sector as an integral part of its economic reform programme. To ensure that these policies are successful, Egypt must also be willing and able to benefit from the development experience of the economic tigers who have recently travelled down the same road to reform.

Reform road still rocky

EGYPT'S economic growing pains are far from over, suggested the World Bank's Khaled Ikram at a briefing for reporters. Shereen Abdel-Razek attended.

Just days before the start of Egypt donors' Consultative Group meeting in Paris, Khaled Ikram, the World Bank's Cairo representative, praised the fruits of Egypt's reform programme, but pointed out that the country will still have to tackle "second generation problems".

According to Ikram, Egypt succeeded in solving the first generation problems that accompanied the implementation of the initial phase of its reform programme, including the reduction of inflation.

"It's now time to deal with the second generation problems," he stated. These problems include labour lay-offs as a result of privatisation, the slow pace of economic reform and the fact that the average Egyptian has yet to witness the tangible outcome of this programme.

Ikram stressed that there are still two main problems confronting the Egyptian economy, weak exports compared to imports and a lack of savings. *In South East Asian countries,* he noted, savings on average account for 35 per cent of the GNP while in Egypt it is half this amount.

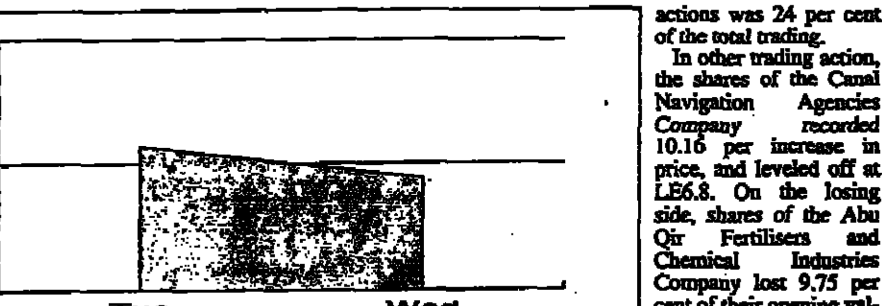
The World Bank's Cairo representative also stressed the fact that the prevalence of weak and inefficient management in Egypt has had a negative impact on Egypt's overall economic performance.

"While Egypt's labour force is very skilled, the absence of sound management undermines their productivity," he stated. Further compounding the problem is the lack of financial incentives for workers. This, said Ikram, is a problem resulting from *Egypt's socialist* years. With good work not being rewarded and poor work not being punished, employees have no incentive to improve their performance, he stated.

Market report

Holiday lull in trading

IN A working week slashed to two days due to the Easter and Labour Day holidays, the General Market Index slid to 389.01, down 4.6 points by 30 April. Over the two-day period, market turnover totaled only *LE141.6* million, less than half the previous week's balance.



Leading the market in terms of the number and value of shares traded was the Development and Engineering Consulting Company (*DECC*), whose initial 10 per cent equity offering was 2.5 times oversubscribed. The high demand prompted the company to increase the number of shares floated to 8.8 million, or *about 25 per cent of the company's* total equity. Trading in DECC's stock, therefore, accounted for 33.4 per cent of total market activity while the value of its transactions was 24 per cent of the total trading.

In other trading action, the shares of the Canal Navigation Agencies *Company* recorded 10.16 per increase in price, and leveled off at LE6.8. On the losing side, shares of the Abu Qir Fertilisers and Chemical Industries Company lost 9.75 per cent of their opening value to close at LE92.06.

Out of the 105 companies whose stock changed hands this week, the share prices of 38 increased, 46 decreased and 21 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

180

Egypt's tradition of free education, begun by Al-Azhar and developed in a modern form by Mohamed Ali, came under threat during the British occupation. In the vanguard of the campaign for its gradual abolition was Douglas Dunlop, secretary to the Ministry of Education. Using reports from *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizk follows Dunlop's machinations, and examines the less than lofty motives of the British government



Illustration: Makram Henein

In the section on education in his annual report of 1906, Lord Cromer, the British High Commissioner writes, "One of the indications of the recognition of the growing importance of education is the promotion of Mr Dunlop to adviser to the Ministry of Education. *Al-Ahram* was to be one of his most vociferous critics.

Douglas Dunlop served in Egypt from 1882-1914. He was selected as adviser to the Ministry of Education in 1890. Six years later he was promoted to the position of secretary to the ministry.

Dunlop was charged with implementing the educational policies of the British occupation authorities. One of these policies was to place the Ministry of Education under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Works, virtually relegating education to a mere department. Marginalising the Egyptian government's role in education in this manner gave Mr Dunlop a virtually free hand in the administration of this ministry, which, under the name of the Ministry of Schools, had formerly been one of the major government departments of the modernising state that was founded by Mohamed Ali. The merging of the two ministries in 1894 was also a convenient way for the British to eliminate the influence of Ali Mubarak, the pioneer of modern education in Egypt in the latter half of the 19th century. Ali Mubarak was dismissed from his post that same year.

A second aspect of British policy was to gradually abolish free education. Lord Cromer's annual report of 1893 states that when the British came to Egypt, they found that "all the money the government spent on education was allocated to the instruction of the children of a small sector of the population, most of whom came from the wealthiest families. The British have therefore sought to change this situation and, since 1884, efforts have been devoted to exacting certain fees with the aim of the gradual abolition of free education."

To Cromer the policy was vital. "It is in the manner of ending a concession that has so far consumed all the finances of the Ministry of Education. Moreover, free education was instituted to help the poor. However, in reality it was only the well-to-do who benefited."

Egyptian nationalists, meanwhile, were correct in assuming that the policy had objectives other than those mentioned by Cromer. One motive was to reduce the numbers of Egyptian intellectuals who formed the backbone of the resistance to the occupation. At the same time, government expenditure would be reduced and money saved could be put towards the repayment of Egypt's creditors, of which Great Britain was one.

It would fall to Mr Dunlop to hasten the pace of its implementation. After less than a year as secretary to the Ministry of Education, Dunlop instituted what *Al-Ahram* termed "the big coup." On 8 June 1898 the newspaper reports: "Hardly has he been appointed to the position of secretary than what Egyptians most feared has transpired. He has overturned the entire system, killing elementary education by shortening its duration and killing secondary education, which is now barely equivalent to the twentieth part of its counterpart in all other civilised countries." However, the true reversal in education policies would take place over the course of the following three years, when Dunlop put into effect the primary mission for which he was appointed: ending free education.

The story of free education in Egypt was related by an *Al-Ahram* reader, Abdel-Meguid Shaaban, in the newspaper's 4 December 1902 edition.

Government schools providing free education were instituted by Mohamed Ali. Under Ali Mubarak's ministry, Shaaban continues, "it was decided that each student would pay 15 piastres a month for his education. However, the people grumbled that this was prejudicial to the poor. The government displayed its compassion and decided to accept every 20 students out of 100 on a free basis."

Shaaban then proceeds to relate how, in the wake of the British occupation, government subsidised education was swept away. In the beginning, he tells us, the government decided to raise annual fees to LE6 per year for day students and LE12 per year for boarders, the additional sum being intended to "cover food, clothes, books and educational materials." At the same time, the government retained the "free tuition department," as it was known.

Throughout the 1890s the fees continued to increase steadily, and by the turn of the century they stood at LE10 per year for day students at the elementary level and LE20 for boarders. Shaaban observed that the last fee rise caused parents to think twice about sending their children to a government school. "When parents saw that they were paying more than LE1 per month for the education of their child (since the scholastic year is nine months long and the tuition is LE10), some decided that they would rather pay this tuition to the foreign schools."

Prompted by Shaaban's article, *Al-Ahram* also contributed a study of its own on the history of free education in Egypt. Appearing in May 1903, the newspaper wrote that in 1868 there were 13 government schools. This situation continued until 1874 when the financial crisis began to lay a stranglehold on the Khedive Ismail. To alleviate the strains on the Ministry of Education budget, the government of Riyad Pasha passed a law requiring that the sons of the well-to-do pay some tuition expenses. However, when the Riyad government fell, "this project fell into oblivion."

Al-Ahram continues that, until the British occupation, 95 per cent of the students enrolled in government schools had benefited from free education. In the immediate wake of the occupation, this figure fell to 80 per cent "as the British began to raise tuition fees and reduce the percentage of students eligible for free tuition. In 1884 they began to implement the law that was promulgated under the Riyad government as a means of ensuring the gradual elimination of free education, since they knew that if they eliminated free education in one go they would empty the schools of all their students.

When Dunlop assumed the position of secretary to the Ministry of Education in 1896, "he instituted tuition fees in the School of Engineering, which had previously been free, virtually emptying the school. As a result, two years ago, the school began to accept students without tuition fees in order to lure back into the system, at which point they began to charge fees again. As for the students of the School of Agriculture, who also used to enjoy free tuition, as of last year the Ministry began to accept only one in 45 students free of charge."

The outcry against these policies was such that the British authorities had to rally together to defend themselves. Sir Eldon Gorst, then British adviser to the Ministry of Finance, argued that the government's policy was "intended to restrict education to those youths who would be nominated for government employment." And Dunlop commented: "We are abolishing free education in order to avert mutual envy and also to reach a position where those who pay fees are not having to support those who do not."

"If envy were truly the reason for abolishing free education, then Mr Dunlop should abolish schools in their entirety on the grounds that the weak envy the strong and the lazy envy the energetic," responded *Al-Ahram*.

Dunlop delivered his major blow to free education in 1902. On 5 March of that year, he assembled all the inspectors of the department of education and told them that free tuition would be abolished at all levels of public education and that charity organisations and *awqaf* (religious endowment) foundations would henceforth be responsible for sponsoring poor students who showed promise. *Al-Ahram* was outraged. "Dunlop thinks that the Ministry of Education was not created in order to provide free education for the people but rather as a commercial market for the buying and selling of learning. We raise our voice against the abolition of the free tuition quota in government schools." With the exception of the pro-British *Al-Muqattam*, all other national newspapers joined the campaign against Dunlop's policy.

A glimmer of hope appeared when, on 28 November of that year, the Higher Council for the Ministry of Education met in order to discuss the issue. *Al-Ahram* appealed to the members of this council "to remember that there is a greater potential for talent among the general populace than among the elite. This is why all other nations have made education both compulsory and free. We do not ask our government to do that; however, we do ask it to apportion a space so that all the talents of the nation can shine through."

All that transpired, however, was that the government retained free instruction on telegraphy in the School of Crafts and Industry and provided for a quota of non-paying students. In this the government had made no concessions. The National Railway Authority was already paying for the training of students on the telegraph and the same authority had stipulated that the Ministry of Education subsidise the education of a certain quota of students in exchange for conceding to it a portion of the land that fell under its administration.

Dunlop addressed the problem of the drop in enrolment in the schools of engineering and education by telling students who had previously failed and had been dismissed from these schools that they would be permitted to return in order to complete their studies. Another result was the establishment of privately run community schools sponsored by Egyptian patrons.

A second major task that fell to Dunlop was to Anglicise public education in Egypt, which, since Mohamed Ali, had been conducted in the French medium. In the beginning of the academic year of 1898 Dunlop summoned the heads of those schools which did not have a department for English language instruction and told them to establish English departments. Several weeks later, he issued instructions to close the French departments in 17 schools.

However, for his policy of supplanting French with English education to succeed, a reasonable number of trained English teachers would be required. Towards this end, Dunlop travelled to England in the summer of 1902. Evidently, this recruiting mission did not proceed as quickly as Dunlop had anticipated. On 16 September of that year, *Al-Ahram* wrote, "Mr Dunlop, the tyrant of the Ministry of Education, will be returning on the 29th of this month bringing in his train several English instructors for Egyptian government schools. The reason for his delay is that up to the present he has not found sufficient candidates that comply with his tastes."

Another of Dunlop's measures was to Anglicise the administration of the schools, a policy that was certain to cause considerable confusion.

The clash between French and English cultures precipitated by Dunlop in the Egyptian school system also caused waves abroad. The controversy was epitomised by the debate between the British language magazine, *Nineteenth Century*, and the French language *Debat*, over the course of 1903.

The *Nineteenth Century* had nothing but praise for Dunlop's policy. In response, the *Debat* reminded the British that there were Catholic schools scattered throughout Egypt that continued to offer instruction in French to the children of the well-to-do, in spite of the British occupation. Moreover, the government schools had been set up in accordance with the French curriculum long before the British came to the country and they continued to follow this curriculum. The author also warned that the British policy of Anglicising Egyptian upper educational institutions was doomed to failure, "particularly as regards the School of Law, for Egyptian law is based on French law and in order to study this subject properly the students must be able to consult French legal source."

It is likely that this debate influenced the negotiations that ultimately gave rise to the entente cordiale that was concluded between Great Britain and France less than a year later. One of the articles of the entente provided for the freedom of French educational institutions to operate in Egypt.

Dunlop was disliked just as much for his commandeering management style as for his policies. He was a proponent of the view that one had to be firm in dealing with Egyptians. Under the headline "The Dunlop Innovation", *Al-Ahram* discusses how the Dunlop concept of strictness was put into effect in Egyptian schools. The immediate manifestation was the increasing severity of punitive measures schools, including temporary suspension. "Dunlop punishes students by depriving them of their education, thereby punishing their families at the same time, since it is they who pay for their child's education," *Al-Ahram* wrote. Dunlop also issued a circular in which he announced that government school teachers were prohibited from teaching in private schools or on a private basis. "Teachers have been quivering in fear of the next decision Dunlop would come up with," commented *Al-Ahram*.

In order to offset the increasing vehement criticism, Dunlop gave an interview to the pro-British *Al-Muqattam*. He was "a disciplinarian", he explained, "which means that I encourage the maintenance of law and order and the harsh punishment of those who break the law." Orientals are loath to maintain law and order, and this was why the Egyptians disliked him, he added.

Dunlop's policies were to provoke more than sharp criticism. The years 1904-5 saw a wave of widespread strikes, beginning with the schools of education and engineering and escalating to a full-scale national teachers strike in May 1904. Responsible for subduing the situation, Dunlop appointed Saad Zaghloul as the minister of education, an appointment that marked the beginning of Dunlop's final chapter in the history of education in Egypt.

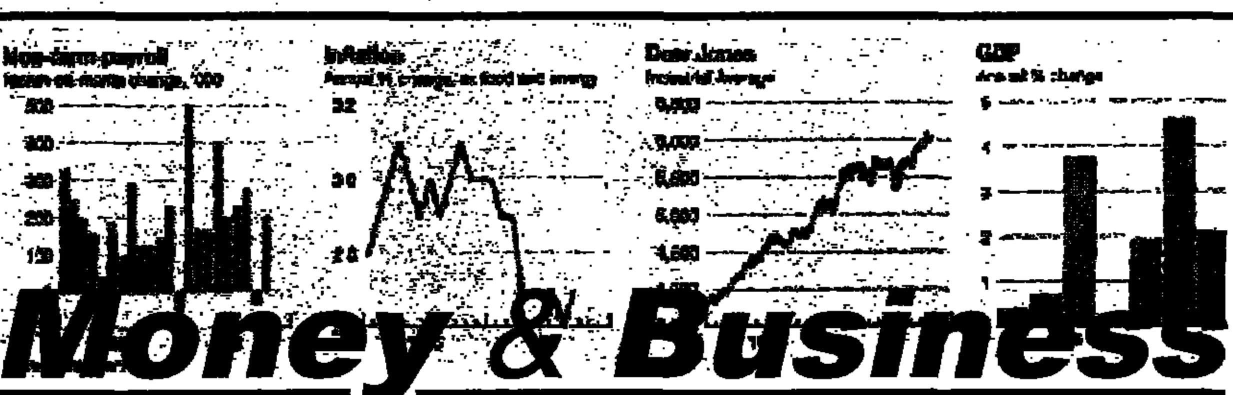
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Enhancing vocational training

THE GENERAL Federation for Workers Unions will form a committee headed by the president of the federation to work on setting a future plan for the federation's activities, El-Said Rashid, president of the federation, stated at the opening ceremony of the construction workers vocational training centre in El-Qattamiya.

He noted that the strategy of the federation is geared towards human resources and providing skilled labour for projects such as the New Valley project. He added that the federation will seek to benefit from the expertise of the early pensioners at all public sector companies.



Taxation conference next week

THE FACULTY of Commerce, Ain Shams University, will organise its ninth conference on taxation which will handle the amendments expected to be introduced to the tax law in order to encourage investment. Dr Reda El-Adl, dean of the Faculty of Commerce, will chair the two-day conference.

The conference, to be held under the auspices of Dr Mohieddin Gharib, minister of finance, and Dr Abdel-Wahab Abdel-Hafez, president of Ain Shams University, will focus on means of eliminating the adverse effects of the tax law.

Coca-Cola announces outstanding first-quarter increases

THE COCA-Cola Company reported that first-quarter earnings per share increased 43 per cent to $0.40 due to outstanding global unit case volume growth. Also contributing to first quarter results was a gain resulting from the execution of the company's strategy of strengthening its global bottling system.

"Our extremely strong first quarter unit volume gain demonstrates the continuing power of our aligned global bottling system and is a solid start towards, once again, achieving *our long-term volume and* EPS growth objectives in 1997," said Robert C. Goizeta, chairman, board of directors, and chief executive officer. "We remain sharply focused on strengthening our system to capture the immense opportunities that exist around the world."

In the first quarter, worldwide unit case volume grew 9 per cent and gallon shipments of concentrates and syrups increased 7 per cent, both exceeding previously communicated volume estimates.

"This rewarding performance is the result of continued investment in the marketplace, and it is paying off around the world — including sizable profitable growth in our most established market, the United States," Mr Goizueta noted.

In the North American Group, first-quarter unit case volume grew greater than 8 per cent, on top of a 7 per cent increase in the first quarter of 1996. Gallon shipments of concentrates and syrups increased 2 per cent during the first quarter. US case unit volume growth was 9 per cent on top of an 8 per cent growth in the first quarter of 1996. Volume growth was strong across all US channels, especially immediate consumption channels, enhancing value for the Coca-Cola system and its customers.

"Results like this in our flagship market, coupled with strong gains, demonstrate again that our US business is far from being a mature *market for soft drinks, in fact, it is* capable of dramatic growth," said Mr Goizueta. "Our system is doing a superb job if implementing our overall marketing strategy and executing at the local level. As a result, our core brands continue to show excellent results."

In the Africa Group, first-quarter unit case volume increased 10 per cent. Unit case volume rose 8 per *cent in the Northern Africa Division*, led by very strong growth in South Africa. Gallon shipments increased 25 per cent in the first quarter.

In the Middle and Far East Group, first-quarter unit case volume increased 8 per cent, on top of a 14 per cent increase in last year's first quarter. Unit case volume grew 19 per cent in China, 6 per cent in Ja*pan, and 15 per cent in the Middle* East Division. Gallon shipments rose 13 per cent in the first quarter.

The company's new income increased by 39 per cent and, with fewer shares outstanding, earnings per share increased 43 per cent. The company purchased approximately 4 million shares of its common stock in the first quarter of 1997. Since 1 January 1984, the company has repurchased 31 per cent of its common shares then outstanding, or a cumulative total of slightly over 1 billion shares, at an average cost of approximately $10 per share. On a weighted average basis, the US dollar was ap*proximately 10 per cent stronger* for the first quarter versus key currencies in the prior year.

In line with the company's well-established strategy of strengthening its worldwide bottling system, gains recognised on bottling transactions provide the company's soft drink business with one of its earnings streams. This earnings stream is in addition to the earnings contributed by the concentrate part of the business as well as by the earnings of the consolidated bottling operations. The other earnings stream of its business is the company's participation in the earnings of bottlers in which it remains an equity investor. The company's long-term objective of growing earn*ings per share in the upper teens* to twenty per cent is driven by *these* earning streams, all of which are an integral part of the soft drink business.

Techtextil opens in Frankfurt

THE FRANKFURT Exhibitions Authority has organised an international fair, Techtextil, this year from 13-15 May 1997 which will include companies specialised in the textiles and garment industries in general, as well as companies manufacturing special textiles used for industrial and technical purposes.

A large number of companies will welcome more than 12,000 visitors from all over the world who visit the international exhibition to learn more about the companies displaying their fabrics and textiles (*natural and synthetic*) *in addition to* textiles used for industrial and commercial aims. The exhibitions feature specialised pavilions including: Agrotech, Buildtech, Clothtech, Geotech, Hometech, Indutech, Medtech, Mobiltech, Ecotech, Packtech, Protech and Sporttech.

Among the topics to be covered at this international exhibition include: technical weaving, textiles and modern technology, new developments in applying alternative technologies, finishing, *textile engineering, and of course, a display of new products.*

The German-Arab Chamber of Commerce offers its services to companies and individuals wishing to attend the exhibition. Entry tickets to the exhibition are LE125, which entitles the bearer to access the fairgrounds for the duration of the exhibition. Airline tickets and accommodations can be arranged by calling Noha Hasan or May Hussein at 3414023. For further information, contact Hasan Saleh at the chamber, tel 3413662/3413664.

Al-Ahram Weekly

The demolition man

In Israel this week, a two-minute siren tore through the bustle of traffic, mourning the deaths of six million Holocaust Jews. On that same day, an Israeli army bulldozer leveled four Palestinian houses located near the Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba. In a traditionally Israeli manner, the mourning of atrocities committed during war is capped by a similar disregard for the rights of others at a time when peace remains the prime objective.

As a carrot to entice the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, Netanyahu plans to offer Arafat progress on commitments made under Oslo. Consequently, should the Palestinians agree to turn a blind eye to the settlement construction on Jebel Abu Ghneim, they can have their own air and seaports. And, should they agree to an acceleration of the final status negotiations, despite repeated reminders by the Israeli premier that sovereignty could amount to little more than a distant dream, the withdrawals from the West Bank will continue. These redeployments, incidentally, are required under the Oslo and subsequent accords, which have already been signed, sealed and, par for the course, yet to be completely delivered.

Arafat, however, is not likely to concede to such requests solely on the basis of *prima facie* evidence. Therefore, Israeli President Ezer Weitzman met with him on Tuesday to attempt to thaw out the freeze that has characterised relations between the two parties since Netanyahu decided to carry out the Abu Ghneim construction. Theoretically, once Weitzman has softened up Arafat enough, US envoy Dennis Ross will arrive, his briefcase full of ideas which, the Palestinian president believes, are unlikely to yield results.

And so the search will go on for a formula for peace. Israel may grudgingly agree to implement the agreements it signed but, most likely, only after it knocks down a few more houses, builds new settlements and raises an uproar about security as a precondition for peace. The real precondition, however, is the same catalyst that will factor into the formula for peace — there are no conditions, save for trust and honouring previous agreements.

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax: 5786126/5786833

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie. Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

A matter of determination

The Arabs face two problems in Israel, writes **Amin Hewedy**: topography and demography are the keys to the struggle

From the date of its inception, following the so-called war of independence in 1948, Israel has acted as a foreign body implanted in a region that rejects it, and recognised that its presence must be imposed by force. It is wrong to suppose, however, that Israeli leaders have arrived at a consensus favouring only one theory for Israel's security, and it would be equally wrong to think that their theories are always constant and unchanging. Nonetheless, there are four parametres that have never changed. Sanctioned by the consensus of the decision-makers, these are, in the order of priority: demography and immigration; topography and the imposition of the status quo; a superpower's support for its proxy; and, finally, the destruction and fragmentation of the Arab states.

Ben Gurion was the first to devise the bases of the comprehensive Israeli security theory following the establishment of the state. What concerns us at present is his view on immigration. According to him, "Israel must by all possible means seek to multiply the number of immigrants. Such an endeavour is the core of Israel's security problem. In the long run, it will support Israeli expansion policies in the region." Ben Gurion believed all Jews of the world constitute one nation, and all must stand by Israel, even if their governments are opposed to it. Furthermore, any Jew living outside Israel is violating the precepts of the Torah, and is, therefore, a "godless Jew, who will remain only partly Jewish pending his immigration to Israel." Ben Gurion had linked topography with demography, a link which remains viable in Israeli thinking to this day. Recently, news agencies reported that the number of Jewish immigrants to Israel during the past month was only 36,000.

In his book *A Place Under the Sun*, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu quotes the Israeli Central Statistics Bureau's findings on demographic evolution. A comparison between the levels of population in 1967 and 1993 reveals that, prior to 1967, Jews made up 63.5 per cent of the total population of Israel, as compared to 36.5 per cent of "non-Jews". In 1993, Jews represented 60.5 per cent and non-Jews made up 39.6 per cent of the total population.

While encouraging high immigration rates, Israel has also been changing the topography of the land it occupies. It has levelled hills, filled valleys, cut away woods, constructed roads, bridges and embankments. The other facet of Israeli policy involves changing the demographic status of the population to preclude any possible means of resolving the problem of refugees and displaced persons, when the time comes to discuss them.

It must be said again: Israel is moving along two main lines. Netanyahu, on the political level, has undertaken diversion tactics to draw attention to himself. Meanwhile, his infrastructure minister, Ariel Sharon, is able to play the principal role: bringing out the bulldozers to seize the land and alter its features through the construction of settlements. This is all done under cover of silence, night and day, while the American veto effectively ties the Arabs' hands. The Israelis are currently applying this strategy in East Jerusalem. While attention is focused upon levelling Har Homa, thousands of immigrants are flowing in through ports and airports. The new arrivals need shelter, housing must be built on additional tracts of land, the land must be levelled in preparation for the construction of houses, and so on, down to the last detail.

On one hand, therefore, Israel seeks to modify the demographic balance; on the other, it implements changes on the ground, in the topography of Palestine. The demographic problem in Israel is not as simple as optimistic official statements make it seem, however. In reality, it is a time-bomb on the verge of going off. In the West Bank, for instance, the belt of settlements constitutes a double-edged problem. It is essential for military purposes, to ensure the defence of Israel to the east, and must therefore be kept intact. At the same time, the demographic problem, constituted by one million Arabs living within and near this belt, makes it equally imperative to relinquish it. Either way, Israel is confronted by a severe problem. The high birthrate among the Arab population will also tilt the balance towards an Arab majority in Israel within 30 years. As one professor foresaw, "the occupied... territories have given Israel 1.4 million Arabs, a heavy acquisition indeed, particularly in view of the expected population increase, which will render the two peoples equal in number within 14 years." The *Jerusalem Post* quoted two demographers as saying that, "by holding on to the Occupied Territories, the Jews may become a minority by the year 2000."

There is yet another problem: that of emigration. According to *A Place Under the Sun*, the eighties witnessed the emigration of 30,000 persons from Israel annually. It is a figure which gives pause, especially after the peace agreement signed between Egypt and Israel, which should have given the Israelis more reason to stay in their country rather than emigrate. The problem was intensified by the kind of people leaving: skilled and specialised workers emigrated and were replaced by unskilled, underprivileged, more recent immigrants such as the Falashas. This is an indication of instability in the economic and security conditions of the country, a situation which flies in the face of Israeli propaganda reports. Emigration poses a serious threat to the Israeli government, and is also perceived as a highly dangerous weapon in the hands of the Palestinians. Through suicide bombings and other operations within Israeli territory, they can disseminate terror and instability in Israel, increasing the exodus and reducing the influx of immigrants. Other factors render this problem still more complicated. Temporary immigrants to Israel from Egypt and the Arab world have caused the rate of mixed marriages to rise drastically. While some Arab regimes have sought to curb this phenomenon, others argue that mixed marriages will necessarily strain the ideology of a state based on the creed of pure Jewish blood, and force the Israelis out of the social ghettoes in which they have confined themselves.

According to Netanyahu, at any rate, the continuous influx of Jewish immigrants will solve all the problems of the regime. The struggle for Jewish immigration, in this perspective, is equivalent to the fight for Israel's survival. He also undermines the value of the conclusions drawn by the demographers, claiming that their deductions are always erroneous.

The Arabs now face a grave problem. One aspect relates to topography, since Israel continues to occupy land, and to change the land's features through the expansion and construction of settlements and roads. The other aspect is demography. Immigrants continue to arrive, and will bring about a change in the population structure. Meanwhile, the US continues to cover up activities on the ground, while pouring funds into Israel to help finance immigration and implement settlement policies.

It is futile to imagine that the bulldozers invading the land and altering its features, or the ships and planes bringing in thousands of immigrants, can be stopped by ineffectual countermeasures, like the statements occasionally issued by Arab regimes. In the balance of power, these are ineffective weapons; for the struggle, first and foremost, is one of determination.

The writer is former minister of defence and former head of the Egyptian intelligence service.

The Harriman Declaration

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed *comments on the round table held outside New York on 20-24 April under the joint auspices of the United Nations and Columbia University to discuss the new media and their implications for the new millennium*

On 24 April, the participants at the round table jointly sponsored by the UN and Columbia University on Communication for the Promotion of Peace, Development, Democracy and Respect for Human Rights issued a number of recommendations. Because the meetings were held in the mansion of the late US politician and financier Averell Harriman, which his family had donated after his death to Columbia University, the document in which the recommendations were issued was dubbed the Harriman Declaration.

Though couched in the somewhat equivocal diplomatic language of the UN, the recommendations are nevertheless clear enough when they touch on information problems related to the developing countries, as illustrated in the following excerpts: "Efforts should be pursued through public/private partnerships that involve civil society expertise and funding on local, national, regional and global levels, and particularly in developing countries"; "Partnerships among businesses, governments, international organisations and civil society should be encouraged to develop and facilitate telecommunications, hardware and software to the particular needs of developing countries"; "The expansion of communications and new media in developing countries must include better access to infrastructure, including reliable power supply".

An abridged version of the background paper which formed the basis of my oral intervention at the round table was published in the last two issues of *Al-Ahram Weekly*. One of the main themes I raised was that the Information Revolution was bringing about a new reality with no precedent in history, namely, the emergence of some sort of collective human intelligence. The removal of time and space constraints thanks to the Internet has made it possible for human endeavour to benefit from the collective creative effort of different thinkers located at different points on the globe. The first generation of machines replaced human muscle; thanks to electricity and electronics, a second generation assumed some of the functions of the human brain: the Internet represents a third generation which can be identified as the embryo of a collective human brain. While collective intelligence is not yet artificial (machine) intelligence, it is nevertheless a necessary if not sufficient condition for its creation.

The discussions focused at some length on one of the more negative aspects of the Information Revolution, which is its in-built propensity to create a growing discrepancy between its key element, namely the computer, and the infrastructure necessary for the spread of computers worldwide. According to what has come to be called Moore's Law, computer power increases every 18 months. If this law can be extrapolated into the future, the power of a computer in the year 2002 will be one million times greater than that of the first prototype in 1946. On the other hand, infrastructure cannot progress at anywhere near the same rate. The deputy president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, eloquently summed up the situation when he said that "More than half of humanity has never made a telephone call. There are more telephone lines in Manhattan than in all of Sub-Saharan Africa."

This has led to a phenomenon which I described as a kind of 'information apartheid', a new form of bipolarity that is neither between East and West nor North and South but between those who are computer-literate and those who are not. Because the former are capable of creating virtual reality, all reality reproduced on a screen is amenable to manipulation; moreover, the new information-privileged will have every interest in manipulating reality, if only to keep their underprivileged counterparts under control. This makes 'information apartheid' morally detrimental to both the privileged and the under-privileged in the information era, to both the manipulators and the manipulated.

An awareness of the dangers inherent in this dichotomy led the round table to stress the importance of trying to bridge the growing gap between those who are computer-literate and those who are not. An 'electronic Marshall Plan' was proposed whereby businesses specialised in the field of computer-development, whether hardware or software, would be encouraged to invest in developing the infrastructures of the underdeveloped countries, both in the fields of electrical power and telephony. This would be beneficial for both sides: the information corporations would be able to expand their markets to the planet as a whole, while the peoples of the underdeveloped world would acquire easier access to electricity, telephone lines and, eventually, to the Internet.

The main obstacle in the way of such a development is conceptual. The new wizards of computer technology are young technocrats who dream of becoming multi-millionaires overnight. Greg Riker, who represented Microsoft president Bill Gates at the round table, told me that the company employed some thirty thousand researchers, of an average age of 32, twenty thousand of whom were already millionaires. These computer whiz kids are not concerned with the historical, cultural and civilisational dimensions of the human users of their discoveries and are unaware how negative the implications of ignoring these dimensions can be. On the other hand, the UN establishment, UNESCO, academia, politicians and journalists concerned with the future of the new technology realise that the debate must be placed in a historico-cultural setting but lack the technical know-how to find a common language with the new computer technocrats. This is where an interface should be developed.

As I told Riker, "You, the sons of the computer age, are for the uninitiated like a meteorite that has fallen from the sky onto our planet. If the question of developing an interface between the planet and the meteorite is not seriously addressed, we will all suffer from the consequences. If, on the contrary, it is handled properly, a new dawn can set in for us all.

Conflict or debate?

By Naguib Mahfouz

The next international conflict will not be between nations but between cultures. Rivalry and opposition, divergence and convergence have always existed among the cultures of the world, in unipolar or multipolar systems. We must endeavour to prevent the relation between cultures from developing into conflict; we need a dialogue, because the world is now smaller than it ever was. For example, the Internet has opened windows all over the world. It is natural that different cultures and civilisations will acquire greater influence, and this will help dialogue to develop.

So why should we assume confrontation? True, there will always be rivalry between cultures, but this is a welcome phenomenon, since it will favour the fitter and more efficient rather than to the more powerful. No matter how powerful a culture may be militarily or economically or politically, it cannot impose itself upon a people unless they are convinced of its superiority to their own culture. If they are convinced, then the new culture is more qualified than the one it replaced.

There is no hatred involved in cultural rivalry, nor should it ever reach the point of confrontation. Were it to reach that point, it would be a sign that we are witnessing not a cultural conflict but a political battle — a very different issue. Cultures should engage only in dialogue. Either one culture will emerge as the most appropriate, or various cultures will coexist. There is always room for a plurality of cultures in art, ideas and literature.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Who trusts Netanyahu?

Al-Mussawar: "Egypt's outlook for overcoming the present crisis in the region can be summarised in three points: First of all, the situation in the Middle East will remain dangerous so long as Netanyahu's government continues to build the Jebel Abu Ghneim settlement and to flout Security Council resolutions and the Oslo and Madrid accords. Secondly, any initiative to circumvent the present impasse must begin by halting settlement activities in Jebel Abu Ghneim and supporting the Egyptian efforts to arrange a meeting between Netanyahu and Arafat in Cairo. Thirdly, a resumption of talks between the parties concerned should involve a commitment on both sides to uphold the Madrid formula of exchanging land for peace and to implement all the accords signed in Oslo in full."
(*Makram Mohamed Ahmed*, 2 May)

Al-Ahram: "It has been said that the Middle East has become a region where US influence is paramount and where the United States has the final say. Events of the recent past all point to the birth of American new colonialism. During the Gulf War former President George Bush sent his forces to plunder the wealth of the region, establish US bases and introduce US warships to Arab waters. This invasion, disguised as a rescue mission, was a move to revive old colonialism. And President Bill Clinton, by allowing Israeli tanks freedom of action in Jerusalem and the West Bank is not just bowing before Israeli designs but announcing that Israel has become the watchdog guarding new US land."
(*Mustafa Mahmoud*, 3 May)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The problem is that the US is trying to pressure the Arabs into granting more concessions. It does not wish to understand that the Palestinians have nothing left to concede, that Syria will not give up an inch of its land and that there will be no peace or security in the region without the return of legitimate Arab rights. The US will continue to pressure Egypt, blackmail the Arabs and side with Israel. It will not change its position unless it is forced to so. This will not happen until it realises that the Arabs possess alternative means to bring about real peace. These alternatives are many, beginning with a resumption of Palestinian resistance acts in the occupied territories and ending with a boycott of US products!"
(*Galal Aref*, 3 May)

Al-Ahram: "This is not the first time we misinterpret Washington's ideas about the peace process. The problem is we have short memories and naively believe that Washington deals with Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, Gaza and the rest of the Arab capitals in the same way it deals with Tel Aviv. We also mistakenly believe that it wishes to see the peace process succeed in accordance with the principles of the Madrid accords which we signed ... Five years have elapsed since Madrid and we must begin again [negotiating] according to Israeli demands, or more accurately, what the Zionist lobby demands."
(*Nabil Khoury*, 4 May)

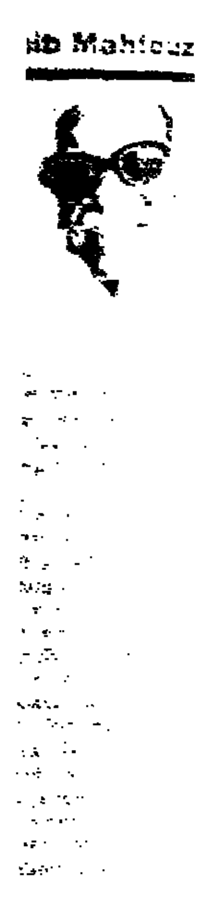
Al-Ahram: "The deadlock in which the peace process finds itself despite recent US efforts is the natural outcome of erroneous US policies. ... No one can dispute the responsibility of the US administration for the unprecedented impasse in the peace process. The United States has encouraged Israel neither to respect previous agreements nor to withdraw from occupied Arab territories and recognise the Palestinian right to self-determination. The collapse of US mediation ... is a deliberate attempt to slaughter the peace process and sacrifice it on the altar of Israeli ambitions and Zionist policies hostile to the Arab nation."
(*Taha El-Magdoub*, 4 May)

Rose El-Youssef: "The CNN has attempted to improve the image of Netanyahu by featuring him with King Hussein in a televised debate. Hussein appeared as the wise ruler who was out to please everyone and was almost apologetic when referring to Netanyahu's views on settlements and the non-enforcement of accords. He was also ready to extend his hand to him and have more talks with him. As for Netanyahu, he wants to speed up talks dealing with all outstanding matters: Jebel Abu Ghneim, the building of settlements and the siege imposed on the Palestinians. He denied that he had ordered the building of new settlements and that one of his ministers had proclaimed the peace process dead. Who trusts Netanyahu? No one, not even King Hussein."
(*Fathi Ghanem*, 5 May)

Compiled by **Galal Nassar**



As the Iranian presidential elections approach, and with the visit to Egypt of the Iranian foreign minister, it seemed appropriate to portray President Rafsanjani. I began with the eyebrows, converging but not quite in agreement. Indeed, all the details of his face — the open mouth, the teeth — are characterised by a certain disjointedness reflecting the complexity of his character.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Fuel to the fire

Whatever the reasons for the postponement of Turkish President Suleiman Demirel's visit to Egypt, it has come at a time of growing Arab concern over cooperation between Israel and the Turkish military establishment, and projected strategic links between Israel and Turkey, backed by or in cooperation with the US, to counter any threats from Syria or Iran.

Since the first signs of military cooperation between Turkey and Israel appeared a year ago, Egypt requested details from the Turkish government regarding the extent of this cooperation and the strategic policies which underlay it. This was one of the principal issues discussed by President Mubarak and President Demirel last June. The Egyptian president was assured that Israeli-Turkish military cooperation merely comprised training and was not directed against any Arab state. The Turkish president added that his country had no intention of concluding a military pact with Israel.

In the course of the last few days, extremely important visits have been exchanged by Israeli military authorities and high-ranking members of the Turkish military establishment, pointing to a considerable development in this cooperation. Israeli airforce planes have received permission to train in Turkish airspace, and agreements have also been signed approving the exchange of intelligence information between Israel and Turkey. An agreement was also concluded to provide repair facilities for Turkish F-4 planes to the tune of $630 million. The agreement also offered Turkey technical assistance in fighting so-called Kurdish terrorism and provided for joint manoeuvres in the Mediterranean to counter Syria and Iran and to face any sudden crisis in the Gulf.

It is to be expected that these developments in military and security cooperation between Turkey and Israel should cause considerable concern in Arab circles, especially as they happen to coincide with specific Israeli threats against Syria, backed by Turkey recently in a very obvious way when the Turkish chief of staff accused Syria and Iran of supporting the Kurdish Labour Party and fundamentalist elements in Turkey. This coincides with Israeli accusations that Syria is developing its chemical weapons capabilities, to which President Assad responded with the remark that those who possess nuclear weapons have no right to accuse others.

The danger of these developments lies in the fact that Turkey is still considered a regional neighbour with strong historical and cultural ties to the Arab states. It represented a factor of stability and equilibrium in the Middle East. Turkey was always careful to preserve this position, even in the most critical moments of tension and confrontation between the Arabs and Israel. For this reason, Turkish moves towards an alliance with Israel, which is governed by the most extremist and violent of governments, must give rise to severe doubts despite repeated Turkish assurances.

These developments seem to stem from the domestic Turkish situation, where a full-scale confrontation is brewing between the military establishment, which upholds a secular state, and radical Islamist trends represented by Erbakan's Rafah Party. The European Union's reluctance to admit Turkey to the European family, as well as the confrontation with the Kurds, may be the main factors prompting the military to strengthen cooperation with Israel, in the hope of solving the Kurdish problem once and for all.

Whatever the reason, it is obvious that the formation of new military alliances and strategic poles can only add fuel to the flames of the Arab-Israeli conflict. If it is true that the United States is supporting and encouraging this alliance, it can only be considered to be igniting the conflagration in the Middle East.



Soapbox

Cultural overhaul

Globalism has destroyed the fallacy of subjectivism. A new era of unprecedented exchange heralds a voluntary transition from nationalism to globalism.

Economics have gained prominence over culture under the hegemony of the "haves" and the "conflict of civilisations". This could pose a threat to Arab culture and civilisation.

Our national heritage has not been capitalised upon to foster Egypt's cultural role. This can only take place by establishing a relationship between heritage and politics. Egypt's role in education and enlightenment has diminished, while that of other nations has advanced. We still believe, however, that by virtue of our civilisation and heritage, we have the final say in all that pertains to Arab culture.

Egypt, however, can resume its leading role. Al-Azhar must resume its traditional cultural and educational functions. We should seek to develop our intellectual abilities and promote systematic thinking. These are the intellectual tools with which to address the challenges of the coming century.

The degradation of Egypt's educational system will not be addressed by limited reforms. We should consider the scientific revival of Egypt's educational role.

Egyptian identity is multifaceted: its many aspects may serve to form links with various cultural entities. Arab culture may be adapted to serve political goals. Political leaders with different or even conflicting views within the unity of Arab culture are the sign of a healthy society.

Accommodating differences, accepting the "other" and responding to change without renouncing basic principles are the very essence of a living culture.



This week's Soapbox speaker is Egypt's ambassador to Austria and permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

Mustafa El-Fiqi

Toward total appropriation

A "popular alliance for peace" was not established in Copenhagen, writes **Edward Said**. Supporters of the peace process, in general, have limited themselves to abusing their opponents, and advocating greater American hegemony

During the early part of this year a meeting between various Arab and Israeli intellectuals was held in Copenhagen with the help of the Danish government. Let us accept the notion that these were intellectuals, even though one of the Israeli participants was an intelligence operative who had many years of well-documented service throughout the Arab world (especially Lebanon), and the Jordanian contingent was reportedly made up of military officers designated for this task by the government (which was unable to find independent civilians to participate in the Copenhagen meeting). Immediately after the meeting, a declaration was issued which was supposed to chart a course towards peace between Arabs and Jews; the claim was that all participants in the meetings were representative of a wider, more popular movement than the few who had gathered in Copenhagen. No evidence was given for this. Nevertheless, the document and news of the meeting were widely circulated and debated in the Arab world with only one or two references to it in the US media, which treated the whole matter as a non-event. Since I do not have all the facts about what took place in Copenhagen, except for the text of the declaration, which struck me as rather weak, I shall confine myself to a few issues that have been raised by participants in the subsequent discussion. These seem to me interesting and worth looking at, especially if one can avoid the frequent name-calling and invective used to discredit adversaries, a most disagreeable aspect of the whole business. And, since I am much more interested in the Arab side, I shall restrict myself to questions that seemed important to it.

One other introductory point seems worth making. Although I was referred to and briefly discussed in an interview with Lutfi El-Kholi — a protagonist at Copenhagen — I myself have had nothing to say about the meeting before now. In the interview, Nuri El-Jarrah asked El-Kholi whether my views on the peace process might have had a bearing on the meetings. Mr El-Kholi responded by saying that, even though he respected me as a literary scholar, I was not, after all, a political person — which seemed to imply that, because I was literary, I had little qualification for anything.

Far be it for me to suggest that I am a political expert or intellectual like Mr El-Kholi, or that I have any of his considerable accomplishments. But it does not seem to be enough of a reason to dismiss someone's views just because he is not accredited by an expert. The whole point of engaging in political debate, I have always thought, was actually the duty of every citizen, not just the prerogative of certified professionals like Mr El-Kholi.

One of the main issues in the debate over Copenhagen has been the question of change in Israeli political thinking: is there a constituency for real peace? Have the conditions in Israel changed sufficiently to warrant hope and a serious Arab political investment in the process of transformation? All the evidence available from history, from Israeli political behaviour, and the like, points most discouragingly away from positive answers to these questions. In the various apologies on behalf of the peace process as well as the prospects for peace with Israel, there seems to be little Arab awareness that, in speaking about, dealing with, or analysing Israel, we have to do with a unique political phenomenon. Israel is not an ordinary state, nor was it ever meant to be. It is "the state of the Jewish people," not of its citizens, who include about 900,000 non-Jews, which is the official Israeli designation for the Palestinian minority in the state. As Professor Israel Shahak said in *Al-Ahram Weekly* recently: "The history of modern Zionism has shown a singleness of purpose which is unmatched by any other contemporary movement. So powerful have been the motivations of its leaders and adherents, so deep is their certainty in the rightness of their course and cause, that violations of mortality, law and human decency have repeatedly been accepted as unfortunate but unavoidable consequences of the fulfillment of their destiny — reclaiming the Biblical Jewish homeland and establishing the Jewish state of Israel."

Were this description simply a matter of ideological conviction in an abstract sense it would be bad enough, but it is also an accurate characterisation of Israeli action since the founding of the state in 1948. I have had occasion in these columns to mention the work of Nur Masalha, the Palestinian-Israeli scholar who has written two books on the centrality of the concept of "transfer" in Zionist thought and practice. His second book, *A Land Without a People*, published in England this year, ought to occupy enthusiasts of the peace process and Copenhagen somewhat more than ill-considered general encomia to the need for new thought, and a new Arab mind. Masalha traces the actions of the Israeli government against the Palestinians from 1948 until the present, showing how the exodus of 1948, the attempts during the 1950s by Ben-Gurion and his associates (Dayan, Rabin, Peres, Allon, Yadin, Hertzog, and the others) to redraw the map of the Middle East so as to eliminate or dissolve Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, the military occupation after 1967, the policies towards Palestinian Israelis, the settlements, and even the Oslo Accords, were all aspects of much the same obsession: to rid Palestine of its original Arab Palestinian inhabitants by expulsion, repression, colonisation, and a kind of willful blindness towards them as human beings. For example, the Israeli attorney general wrote in 1971 about deportations by Israel of Palestinians from their homes to Jordan: "Deportation of a person to Jordan is... neither deportation to the territory of the occupying power nor to the territory of anther country. It is more a kind of return or exchange of a prisoner to the power which sent him and gave him its blessing and orders to act." (p.131). According to Masalha, there has been a longstanding effort to force Palestinians to emigrate, and even to provide funds for them to go to Argentina, Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America.

During the 1980s, a powerful right-wing extremist movement gradually gained power and influence over politics in Israel, encouraged, of course, first by Begin, then by Shamir, and now by Netanyahu. Groups like Gush Emunim, the Kach, Tehya, and Moledet parties, and the Whole Land of Israel Movement, have not only openly advocated annexation of Palestinian land, but also an unyieldingly hostile view of Palestinians as "aliens" in the land of Israel. True, Masalha concedes, there have been liberal Israeli critics of these tendencies and parties, but not enough of them to stop such groups or to make them modify their extreme views. Besides, it should be obvious that the influence of the right-wing has been greater than that of the liberals, who seem to have diminished in size and influence since Oslo. Moreover, the Oslo Accords do not obviate the desire on the part of Labour as well as Likud to stunt Palestinian development, to annex most of the West Bank and, above all, neither to give back settlements nor to concede any Palestinian rights in Jerusalem. In that city, the deputy mayor, Shmuel Meir, is on record as planning to "devour Arab East Jerusalem and reduce its Arab community to an insignificant minority." The plan includes demolishing more Palestinian houses, building more settlements, stripping more Palestinians from Jerusalem of their identity and residence permits. Not for nothing did Oslo neither recognise Palestinian self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian state, nor foresee and plan for anything but continued Israeli domination and sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza.

A great deal has been made by Copenhagen and peace process enthusiasts of people like Yossi Beilin, who is routinely considered to be a dove and something of an ally of the Palestinians. Having myself heard Mr Beilin last year in Washington defend the Qana massacre, I am somewhat less convinced, but it is true that he has had cordial dealings with Palestinian leaders like Abu Mazen. The two of them produced a "secret" document on the final settlement supposedly acceptable to both sides. Not only was the document leaked everywhere, but Beilin made a similar agreement with a Likud Knesset member in which it was decreed that there would be no uprooting of settlements (which will be annexed by Israel), no return to the 1967 borders, no Palestinian state (but only a demilitarised "entity"), and that the Jordan Valley will remain an Israeli security zone. He put it quite plainly in *Ha'aretz* on 28 March 1997: we will have a "demilitarised Palestinian entity, with limited sovereignty, in return for a whole and undivided Jerusalem." He said even more at a televised round-table on 17 March 1997: "I am in favour of building everywhere in Jerusalem, including the building of Har Homa, since this is our right; the question is one of timing and clever tactics. We [the Rabin government] increased settlements by 50 per cent, we built in Judea and Samaria, but we did it quietly and with wisdom. You [the Netanyahu government] proclaim your intentions every morning, frighten the Palestinians and transform the topic of Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel — a matter which all Israelis agreed upon — into a subject of world-wide debate. The main thing is to get the Palestinians to agree that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. Without their agreeing to this, there will be no agreement." (Quotes from Tikva Honing-Parnass, *News from Within*, April 1997).

With so reliable and honest an ally, Arabs have very little to worry about: the Israeli peace camp is lined up and ready to march with us! What bothers one about Arab commentators and intellectuals who support Copenhagen and the peace process is why they never confront people like Beilin and Kimche with public questions about their real attitudes. After one hundred years of unbroken Israeli-Zionist hostility to the native Palestinians, and fifty years of mostly successful attempts to destroy their corporate social and political existence, dispossess them of their land, reduce their actuality to that of blacks under apartheid or native American Indians on reservations — with the active collaboration of an incompetent, discredited, and totally corrupt Palestinian leadership — one would have expected a little more scepticism from Messrs El-Kholi and company than the stream of insult and abuse directed against honest Arab critics of Israel and the peace process. Why do Mr El-Kholi and his friends not direct their energies toward trying to change Zionism, especially since, at present, they show very little knowledge of either Israel or the Zionist movement? Why this unseemly enthusiasm for peace with an ideological state that has shown very little inclination, if at all, to concede either on matters of doctrine or on the ground?

The other major issue in the post-Copenhagen debate has concerned an entity obscurely referred to as "the Arab mind", as if one could speak responsibly of so vast, not to say stupefyingly general an object with any degree of sense. So let us begin by saying that, by attacking the Arab mind in so racist a way, accusing it of derangement and simple "madness," the pro-peace, pro-US Arab commentators, mostly expatriate former leftists, contribute only to the general demoralisation that has overtaken Arab political and social discourse. For them, being modern is being opportunistic. Very little is said about the policy either of Israel or the US, while a great deal that is defamatory is said about individuals whose views are taken to be retrograde, unmodern, and basically stupid. In a typical piece of transparently illogical rhetoric, one of them accused Arab intellectuals of not having a new enough style of the kind of thought that is required to think about peace; even Palestinians, he says, think too much about the wrongs done them and not enough about the future. Or some such drivel. As if one could separate the past from the future, particularly when one is dealing with an opponent whose whole *raison d'être* is a realisation of the Old Testament, which is nothing if not a style of thought rooted, indeed frozen in the past. So completely has this individual intellectual separated himself from the past that, in 1991, in a prominent American journal of opinion, he advocated an American invasion of Baghdad and the military occupation of Iraq by the US military. If this is an example of new futuristic thinking, one would be right in dismissing it as a fraud, and seeing in it only the old complexes of people for whom the White Man's power is to be worshipped, fawned upon, and emulated at all costs.

Clearly we need more, not less debate in the Arab world. But we cannot accept as debate and free expression of opinion anything that is coercive, and has the authority of official thinking to enforce its claims. The real burden has to be put back aggressively on Israel, to require of its citizens and intellectuals a qualitative change from a political ideology that has never deviated from extreme chauvinism and downright aggression against Arabs, both Palestinian and non-Palestinian. Unfortunately, however, the real tragedy is that, in the Arab world, we have neither the social and political institutions to carry on an open debate with equals, nor the unity and sense of purpose to confront a ruthless, and ruthlessly single-minded, opponent. Until we do, the distorted claims and counter-claims that have emanated in the aftermath of the Copenhagen meeting and declaration will probably continue with no effect at all on the Israeli advance towards the total appropriation of Palestine.

To The Editor

Put the *Weekly* on the Internet

Sir- My family and I have become faithful readers of *Al-Ahram Weekly* — an excellent political publication that is unmatched in Egypt. This view, incidentally, is also shared by the foreign community living in Egypt. Some of our friends, who have left the country, have asked us to send them a copy on a regular basis as they wished to remain abreast of the events here.

The *Weekly's* layout is attractive; its headlines catchy without being presumptuous; its contents varied; the choice of news items, articles, views and comments, judicious and balanced. Since it is also written in perfect English, it is a most pleasant and interesting paper to read. Moreover, given that it accurately reflects this society's on-going political dialogue, without attempting to impose the "official" line, the reader is left to decide for himself.

Having said that, I feel it my duty to propose that you substantially widen *The Weekly's* circle of readers — especially those non-Egyptians living beyond our borders and who neither know of the paper's existence, nor its evident value. The way to do this is through the Internet, where Egypt's presence, unforgivably, remains marginal.

Among the foreign publications that can be read without charge on the Internet are *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Time Magazine*, to name a few. As far as I know, the only Egyptian publications on the Internet are *Egypt Today* and *The Egyptian Gazette*. Confronted with this, I ask you: why is *Al-Ahram Weekly*, which I would definitely put on par with foreign publications, missing from this list? By taking this small, but all important, step, Al-Ahram Organisation would greatly contribute to enhancing the Egypt's international image, as well as that of its printed media.

Ambassador Omar Sirry
Cairo

In defence of music

Sir- Umm Salahadin, in her letter to the Editor (*Ahram-Weekly*, 27 March-2 April) makes a case against music, and tells us that "strong derision" of it is found in the *Hadith*, as well as in the Old Testament. Without backing up her assertions with references, she also mentions "a long-standing fear and loathing", presumably of music.

I wish to point out that music is almost as old as the world, and its universality is well-established. There is no society on the face of this earth, however primitive, that does not include music and dancing among its folk arts. This was the case in 7th century Arabia. The Prophet Mohamed himself enjoyed music. On one occasion, as a group of singers and dancers were performing in his courtyard, he prevented Abu Bakr from sending them away. He even joined his family in watching them, and was seen to beat the rhythm with his foot. Al-Shaymaa', who shared the same wet nurse as the Prophet, was a reputed singer. The eminent Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mustafa Abdel-Razeq, made no secret of his admiration and enjoyment of Umm Kulthum's singing. The Qur'an itself contains no mention of music, let alone derision or loathing.

Let me remind Umm Salahadin that services in churches and synagogues are partly sung and the organ is played in church. In recent times, religious music gave rise to some of the most popular American genres, the spiritual and blues. In Islam, the call to prayer and reading of the Qur'an are chanted, and the "*tawasheeh*" are indeed religious songs.

Classical music has its earliest sources in the church and some of the world's most sublime music was inspired by Christianity. Medieval motets, Bach's Passions, Handel's Messiah, Hayden's masses, and Mozart's Requiem are but a few examples. Composers were sponsored by princes, but often also by high prelates of the church.

Blaming an art form for its abuse or misuse by some misguided or badly-intentioned few, is like blaming the air for the pollution particles that harm our health.

Djenane Ahmad Kamil
57/A Road 13, Maadi
Cairo

Blameless music

Sir- I'm writing in response to Umm Salahadin's letter "Blaming music" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 27 March-2 April). The writer claimed that "Strong derision of music is found in the Old Testament". I wonder where she had got such an idea. I dare say this allegation is unsubstantiated and can be easily refuted by so many Biblical verses. In Psalms 33:2, we read, "Praise the Lord with the lyre, make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song, play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts." Many other examples can be easily cited by the reader of the Old Testament.

Moreover, recent research has proved that music can be effectively used in treating certain kinds of physical and psychological diseases.

I do believe that some of us have no ear for music and try hard to convince ourselves that it is music which is to blame.

Surprisingly enough, it has been proven recently that certain kinds of plants respond to music in one way or another and some agricultural researchers are even probing the possibility of using music with the aim of increasing crop productivity!!

Does it make any sense that, as the twentieth century draws to a close, there are still people demanding that music be prohibited and think of it as though it were a great sin?

Essam Hanna Wahba
Salam Language School,
Assiut

Editor's announcement:
***Al-Ahram Weekly* will shortly have a site on the Internet. Meanwhile, please make use of our e-mail address: weekly@ahram.org.eg**



YOUSSEF CHAHINE's *Al-Massir* (Destiny), entered in the main competition at Cannes, the world's major film festival which opens this week, stars Nur El-Sherif as Ibn Rushd. The film's 15 May screening at the Salle Lumière, which will be attended by Chahine and most of the cast, will be the film's world premiere, with Egyptian audiences having to wait until 18 August before *Al-Massir* goes on general release.



No "stink of dirt and drink"

Eva Maria Lerchenberg-Thony's dance version of Georg Buchner's *Woyzeck* at El-Hanager could have done with a touch of the sordid, writes **Nehad Selaiha**

If your taste inclines towards the post-modernist in art with its thick ambiguities, disconcerting stylistic shifts and ironic twists, then Eva Maria Lerchenberg-Thony's interpretation of *Woyzeck*, which opened at El-Hanager 26 April, would not be exactly your cup of tea. Her choreographic composition of Buchner's piece (1836), though it occasionally makes use of some of the vocabulary of postmodernist dance, remains closely allied to classical modernist dance in its integral unity and coherence and its striving to express what *Martha Graham called 'the inner land*scapes' and achieve what Susan Langer described as 'significant form'. There is no trace here (as there were none in her two previous works seen in Cairo: Sartre's *Huis Clos*, or Geschlossene Gesellschaft, and *Callas*) of any attempt to baffle the viewers, obstruct or subvert their interpretation of the meaning of what they see, or check their emotional involvement in it. No *conflicting perspectives here, paradox*ical readings, and not a hint of irony or a whiff of parody or humour.

In the interest of dramatic lucidity and force, Lerchenberg-Thony has boldly sacrificed both the thematic density and tonal complexity of Buchner's text and concentrated, almost exclusively, on the eternal triangle at the heart of the play. Woyzeck, his mistress Marie, and her lover, the drum-major, are whisked out of their sordid, bestial and grotesque social milieu and projected as elemental forces, archetypes, or pure passions, locked in conflict on a cosmic stage. Even the minor characters are generalised out of recognition and recreated as one big hostile force. This policy resulted in a marked and interesting shift of dramatic focus, making Marie, rather than Woyzeck, the gravitational centre of the performance.

Whether Lerchenberg-Thony meant it or not, this shift of focus had exciting feminist implications. It was as if she had decided to go against the traditional reading of the text and project it from the point of view of the female victim. What engages our emotions here and provides the most stirring and erotic dance sequences is Marie's moral dilemma as she is torn between her overpowering sexual passion for one *man and her loyalty and duty to an*other. In one eloquent sequence she tries to walk out on her husband to follow her lover, but the husband, sprawled on the floor, holds on to her ankles, pinning her to her place; with great effort she frees one foot and lunges forward, but then freezes for a second, panting, looks back, bends down to embrace the husband between her legs while he assumes a foetal position. Indeed, the foetal position was the hallmark of *Woyzeck* in this production and signalled to the audience not only his helplessness and pathetic weakness, but also his dual dependence on Marie as both lover and mother. Was there a hint of oedipal fixation here? In Buchner's text Marie has a little son, but here the choreography unites the husband and the son into one figure and the relationship between the three members of the triangle gains in com*plexity and so does Marie's moral con*flict.

But invigorating as such a feminist reading of the play may be, one cannot help regretting the simplification and omissions it entailed. One missed the earthy realism of the world Buchner portrays, his deliciously grotesque caricatures and many vivid vignettes. In Lerchenberg-Thony's scheme of things there was no place for anything coarse or sordid, obscene or vulgar, and in this rarefied atmosphere one could hardly imagine Buchner's drunken 'apprentice' singing out loud in the tavern, in scene *12*: "I'm wearing someone else's shirt/ My soul's a stink of drink and dirt"; or delivering a farcical, blasphemous parody of a sermon and winding it up with four-letter words. Nor could one imagine Marie admiring the drum-major for being 'broad as an ox' with 'a beard like a lion', and hear the major retorting: 'We'll start a stud for little drum-majors'.

In this production the three main characters, Woytzeck (Ahmed Abdel-Aziz), Marie (Reem Hegab), and the drum-major (Mohamed Shafiq) looked beautiful, graceful, ethereal and thoroughly romantic, while the minimalist set (a bare stage with just a white screen at the back), the frugal, unobtrusive lighting effects, and Judith Wegener's simple black and white costumes, with a tiny splash of red, placed them in a neutral, formalised, ahistorical context.

A degree of simplification is perhaps inevitable in adapting any literary text, *and particularly one as rich as Woyzeck*, to the medium of dance and movement — even when the artist achieves a perfect correspondence between music and movement as Lerchenberg-Thony does here. But here, the simplification went a bit too far, and I could not help wondering if this was not, perhaps, the result of working on a tiny budget with a group which consists mostly of amateurs, with little *or no previous training or experience* in dance theatre. The production was the result of two one-month workshops conducted over two successive years; and judging by the performance of the dancers in general, and that of Reem Hegab in particular, one cannot but congratulate Lerchenberg-Thony on the remarkable success of her project. She has achieved a great deal in a very short time and ought to be proud of her students and of the valuable work she has done in and for Egypt. In return, she has gained not only our respect and gratitude, but also our deep affection.

Music

Moonlight and whispers

David Blake learns faith, hope and charity

Le Nozze di Figaro (in Arabic); Cairo Opera Company; Cairo Opera Orchestra; Cairo Opera Choir; conductor, Ivan Filev; director, Abdallah Saad; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 2 May



From left: Reda El-Wakil and Nevine Allouba rehearsing; director Abdallah Saad

This production opens with a splendid, expansive set, the palace of Count Almaviva near Seville, supposedly late eighteenth century rococo though it looks more baroque than anything. It is supposed to be Figaro's bedroom. The space is more than large and seems to resemble a forest rather than a servant's bedroom. But opera being opera, the audience can accept this since the forest is probably a tapestry. He and his future wife Susanna are making up the bed. With any luck, Figaro will soon be married, *though with the libretto Da* Ponte writes you will need more than luck to have a successful marriage.

On stage beds are tremendous symbols. Life and death, and anything between that can happen to a human being takes place in bed. As hard-working theatre-goers of the late twentieth century, with a bed bang on centre stage we know what's coming. But the new producer at the opera, Abdallah Saad, twists the well-worn banalities of the story so that some surprises are to come. Before Figaro can put this nuptial ornament to its rightful purpose we travel through four hours of music, almost Mozart's longest work. The going, inspite of his genius, can be a hard listen — Wagner's *Meistersinger* sounds shorter. But Abdallah Saad's production irons out the *usual trivialities* and the *music* moves at a quick pace.

Anyway this opera is not really the story of Figaro, it is the picture of an age, one which toppled over backwards into the abattoirs of 1789 and by so doing brings the eighteenth century into a blood stained end. Blood on the brocaded surface and charm of the *music*.

Central to the human scene is the story of the crack up of the marriage of Count Almaviva, owner of the palazzo in which it all takes place. He has a wife, an ironic beauty who knows all about his extramarital lifestyle but loves him still. Beauty and the beast, and what a beast is Almaviva.

After *interminable* twists which the music sifts over the complicated tale of Figaro, it ends in the moonlight, silver, polished and shining. Who could possibly smudge the end and look beneath the dazzling surface. Mozart did, but not as sharply as Da Ponte. And Abdallah Saad did. Above all things the Cairo Opera needs *him*, a producer who can clean up the dramatic and visual side of the repertoire. The four changes of scene in this Figaro move silently and rapidly into each other without fuss. There are no waits as the usual seismic rumblings announce the change of scene.

The Cairo Opera stage is a beauty — the Viennese production of *Cosi Fan Tutti* revealed its scope and power of audience contact. This production presents a spacious, lived in area, real people inhabited with things — stepladders, garden tools and cloth*ing* — left lying around. Not exactly untidy but pleasantly lived in. The lighting throughout is subtle and active, not just spots on people. Each scene has its particular aura, ending in a garden scene worthy of any "big house" production. Moonlight and whispers, shadows and ghosts, an old civilised place where even the border plants have sharp tongues.

The costumes, as usual with the Cairo Opera, are beautifully tailored and apt. Even the chorus looked like people attached to the play and not eleventh hour hired hands. Mozart, however heavenly, always has plenty of things which bite the unwary performer, singers, orchestra and conductor. Everything must be brisk to survive. *In this production the Cairo* Opera Orchestra has a tough job.

The entire music world is supposed to know that *this* score is perfection. Hours long, it melts effortlessly from scene to scene supported by its machinery and the *craftsmanship* of a demon. Solo, duet, trio, on to quintet and then a few more voices plus choruses and inspite of all this the fabric stays clear and adamantine. It can be seen through, and that's the trouble. In the early days of "joli Mozart" opera stars thought they took nights off Puccini and Wagner, the basic stuff of their careers, to sing a few hours of *Figaro*. Amadeus became a bore. Mahler put a stop to all this, brought in theatre producers, singing actors and conductors who thought more of the work in hand than their sticks.

By the nineties Mozart has gone the whole path into sing-theatre. The ladies are in their underclothes or nothing and the work moves out *of any def*inite society into smut and sleaze. The result is just any old musical, but the reaction has begun and that is about the position of the Cairo Opera Figaro. It has no sex mock up or a genteel evening at the opera, but a real story attached to music which, if treated tactfully, can withstand the four *long* hours.

The second act, which exposes the people of the story as a tawdry crowd, was the musical height of the show. Ivan Filev brought it off, and so did the singers. The count is a bastard. Reda El-Wakil has the voice and dramatic thrust for a *thrusting part. He also has* something else — a fatal quality of tenderness which, covering as it does the instincts of a *hyena*, presents *this subject as a* royal beast. His seduction of Susanna was first rate operatic acting. He never just sang *along. The countess* was Nevine Allouba and she puts the word with the music. Aided by the production, her countess was beauteous and poised as should be to fit her music. But she almost danced the character. This production centered on her feelings and the elaborate trick of put down she plays during the final moments of the opera to bring about the submission and apology of her husband. The dramatic handling of the "letter scene" was natural and unaffected. She was businesslike, no grande dame sitting in a chair in argumentative mood. She gave out the words of the letter with a purpose. It was no fun. She wanted to keep her husband, jungle prowler or no, and she suggested that she loved *him, but will probably* pay him back with his own tactics at a later date. The countess holds the plot to the end when Mozart finally drops the disguise of the clown, and Rosina comes into her own with real feeling, warmth and tolerance.

Taheya Shamseddin sang Susanna. She has a pure, clear voice and strong technique. She *acts well and looks seductively* witty. Mozart was chilly about his operatic women but Allouba and Shamseddin at least moved his misogyny out of the eighteenth century and put it into a more tolerant twentieth.

Raouf Zeidan sang an articulate Figaro. He was a complex figure, more executive than servant. He never strutted or ogled, he had his own quality and a way of slanting his body and listening patiently to *what was being said. He* was a man of a certain station. "Serf" barks the count at him. "No," came Zeidan's look, "better than you". He had power in reserve and this was the cause of the count's jealousy of him. It was less sexual than moral.

Cherubino introduced Hanan El-Guindi. Cupid, Cupidon or some sort of god of mischief with ancestors going back to pagan times, El-Guindi is a remarkable figure on stage. Towering, tall, a perfect Latin profile, high-mannered with a melting mezzo soprano voice. What can an opera house do with her? Give her hag rales, as *the bewigged grandmother* witch burning at the stake? There are roles for her and Cherubino is one of them but *the transvestite* style was more or less bypassed. Cherubino remained firmly feminine.

Maybe here we should face *the Arabic language problem* in European opera. Arabic spoken in life can sound explosive enough, but the same words used to accompany European classical music seem to disappear. Maybe *Tosca* in Arabic would sound better. But Mozart, Bellini, Bizet's *Carmen* and Verdi fit nothing but themselves. As the composers of these particular operas have all written, think first of the word and the rest will follow. This rather leaves Arabic on a shelf and non-active in the opera house. Cherubino does not belong to any tradition at all in the Arabic world, so El-Guindi, for all her artistry and looks, was left morooned, in the same place as the language. The Arabic sound seemed to cast the vocal *line into a whisper*.

A few years ago the Arabic *Don Giovanni* sounded well but for the quick fire chatter of *Figaro* it really seemed to slow everything down and the vocal line disappeared.

As the hours passed, the thought came, how popular is *Figaro*. It has the brand name of Mozart. It travels well even to Japan. It is almost operatic soap inspite of the distinction of its creator. But do people love it as they do *Tosca*? Is it necessary to love *Figaro* anymore? It has become faith, hope and charity, and it's no use worrying about it any longer.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Hussein Shariffe (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 2pm-9pm. Until 8 May.
New works under the title Innerspace.

Al-Ahram Artists Collective Exhibition
Al-Ahram Bldg, Main Hall, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100/400. Daily 9am-10pm. Until the end of the month.
Works by Makram Henein, Nagwa El-Ashri, Nagui Kamel and Mohamed El-Nasser.

Ana Parker
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 8 May.
Photographs of Haj paintings.

John Feeney
Sony Gallery, as above. 12 May-5 June.
Architectural photographs.

Group Exhibition
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 9 May.

Moustafa Ahmed (Paintings) & Fatma Refaat (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 10 May.

Hedayet El-Mallawany (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, as above, 14-31 May.

Nazih Rashid (Wooden Sculptures)
Dania Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Borg El-Ataba', Bab El-Louk. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc Fri, 12pm-9pm. Until 15 May.

The Architecture of Old Cairo
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madrasat El-Hoqouq El-Fernsiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-9pm. 11-17 May.

Selim (Oil on Paper)
Akhnaton Gallery, 4a & 4b, Centre of Arts, El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 22 May.
Works under the title "On Music and Musicians", "On Body and Nudes" and "On Signs and Symbols".

Romano Della Chiesa (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. Until 22 May.

Elfi Fröhlich (Photographs)
Museum of Contemporary Egyptian Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 24 May.
Works under the title Staging of Authenticity.

Zakaria El-Khanany (Glassworks), Kamel Ghandar (Watercolours) and Mohamed Oraby (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 25 May.

Paul Rinaldi (Drawings, Paintings & Photographs) and Julie Cassh (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 29 May.

Ursula Broech (Drawings and Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. 13-29 May.

Hazem El-Mestikawy
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 2pm-9pm. 11-29 May.

Group Show
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 4 June.

Maquettes
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madrasat El-Hoqouq El-Fernsiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 5 June.
Research works by the students of the Architecture School of Nancy, currently in Cairo, on Bab Nasr.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including mashrabiya, instrument ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

German Films
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
13 May, 7pm: **Mephisto**, directed by Istvan Szabo.
14 May, 7pm: **Strongman Ferdinand**, directed by Alexander Kluge (1975).

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Samaka Wa Arba' Qoroush (A Fish and Four Sharks)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. El-Haram II, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Esma'a Wa Khamas Regal (A Woman and Five Men)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit And Adila II)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.



Galal El-Hosseiny

Dante's Peak
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Empire Strikes Back
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Phenomenon
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Last Dance
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Desperado
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Jerry Maguire
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Craft
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Star Wars
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Glimmer Man
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

A Low Down Dirty Shame
Karim I, as above. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Solo
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur-Sat, midnight show.

MUSIC

[redacted]
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 8 May, 8pm.
The string department of the Conservatoire, directed by Prof Nahed Zikry, perform works by Bach, Lalo, Paganini, Bizet, Taimsade, Schumann, Erdeli, Haydn, Debussy, Boccherini and Ahmed Fahmy, among others.

Egyptian Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 8 May, 9pm.
Violinist Jasser El-Serafi, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi, performs Schwertsik's Dracula's Home and court music op.18, Schubert's Rondo in A-major D 438 for violin and string orchestra and Schönberg's The Night of Transfiguration op.4.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 9 May, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

The Egyptian Musical Youth
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 10 May, 9pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 10 May, 9pm.
Programme includes Gorsky and Mahler.

Oboe, Harp and Horn Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 13 May, 9pm.
Mohamed Saleh (oboe), Manal Mohieddin (harp) and Amr Abul-Naga (horn).

The Merry Widow
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 13-16 May, 9pm.
Cairo Opera Company, under Moustafa Nagui.

The Osiris Singers
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 14 May, 8pm.
Selections from Ain't Misbehaving and The Sound of Music.

THEATRE

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Wallace Theatre, AUC, Greek Campus, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. 11-17 May, 8pm.

An Evening With Francisco Arrabal
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 3 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 337 1962. 13 & 14 May, 8pm.
The Rebellious Theatre Troupe, directed by Hani Ghanem.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 10pm.

Baloum Fil Ballon (Baloum at the Balloon)
Balloon Theatre, Corniche El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily 9pm.

Masa' El-Kheir Ya Masr (Good Evening Egypt)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 9pm.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell, Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9pm.

El-Mar'a Allati Tekallem Nafsoha Kathiran (The Woman Who Speaks To Herself Too Much)
Zaki Tolaimat Hall, El-Tali'a Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 937 948. Daily 9pm.

El-Mahzala (The Disgrace)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

LECTURES

Egypt During The First Fitna
Room 203, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan and Mohamed Mahmoud Sts. Tel 357 5060. 11 May, 5pm.
Lecture by Wilfred Madelung, professor of Arabic, Oxford University.

Mahmoud Taha, Un Réformiste Soudanais
CEDEJ, 14 Gam'eyet El-Nisr St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 13 May, 5pm.
Lecture in French by Dr Mostafa Khayati, CEDEJ.

Third Annual Conference on Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Mediterranean
The American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. Daily, from 13-15 May, 10 am - 6.30pm, Oriental Hall, Main Campus. For programme call AUC

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries



Gamal Abdel-Nasser

SACRED architecture is the source of inspiration of the installation by **Farghali Abdel-Hafiz** on show at the **Centre of Arts, Zamalek**. Exhibited with the installation are dream-like, residually figurative paintings.

Al-Hanager Gallery plays host to a group show of experimental works by **Ahmed Omar, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, George Fikri, Magda Abdel-Fettouh, Hanaa Harraz** and **Rasha Seliman**. Particularly worth noting is the huge (10 metre wide) painting with an aerial perspective of a city by Fikri.

Paintings and watercolours — landscapes and cityscapes — by **Mohamed Sabri, Abdel-Aal Hassan** and **Mohamed Tarrawi**, and 12 sculptures by **Ibrahim Abdel-Malak**, which take the female form as their subject, are on show at **Duroub Gallery**.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***

Tales in the telling

Noctumal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context, Ferial J Ghazoul. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996

The Arabian Nights is basically about sex and politics, and while this fact can go a long way in explaining why the collection of tales has attracted so much interest throughout history and across the globe, ultimately there must be more to the phenomenon. After all, sex and politics are fairly common categories in the subject matter of world literature, and yet not every text dealing with them can claim to have influenced the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Giovanni Boccaccio, William Shakespeare, Samuel Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Edgar Allan Poe, Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Taha Hussein, and Naguib Mahfouz, to name only a few. What makes the interest in this work even more amazing is that its influence seems to travel across the boundaries of cultural traditions to influence both European and Arab critics, even though it is not even considered part of the Western literary tradition, and is still looked down upon as "folk" or "popular" literature by many Arab readers. What one learns from Ferial Ghazoul's new study of *The Nights* and the various examples of world literature in which it resonates is that the overwhelming popularity of the work among writers, critics, and readers of various stripes has as much to do with the way its stories are told as it does with its racy subject matter.

Nocturnal Poetics is an outgrowth of earlier work by the author on *The Arabian Nights*. Here she offers a current version of her reading of the tales in the opening chapters, then adds studies of other works in the last third of the book that raise a set of literary issues similar to those raised by *The Nights*. The texts discussed include several works in which similarities are unequivocally a result of direct influence (a short story by Borges and novels by Barth, Hussein, and Mahfouz), a work whose similarity probably springs from some sort of indirect transmission (Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*), and a work whose similarity to *The Nights* results from its originating in a similar cultural milieu (*The Panchatantra*, a collection of Indian fables). But thankfully, Ghazoul shows little interest in trying to prove who actually did or did not know about *The Arabian Nights* in medieval and renaissance Europe. Her focus is first and foremost textual.

Thus, Ghazoul acknowledges from the onset that her primary concern is with "the internal organization of the text," and in fact, argues persuasively for the necessity of such an approach in the case of *The Nights* in particular. A text with no author, compiled over the course of several centuries, and without so much as a modicum of critical agreement on the authority of the various textual variants, it is not surprising that *The Nights* became a favourite of formalist, structuralist, and post-structuralist critics in Europe. Thus, Ghazoul's own approach to the text, heavily influenced by this critical trend, is completely justifiable.

Issues related to textual variants and historical origins are touched on in passing, but the focus of the first two thirds of the book is the internal structure of *The Arabian Nights*, beginning with an elaboration of the work as a semiotic system, moving to the way the distinctive method of story-telling creates movement from tale to tale, and finally categorising the various types of stories contained in the work. This typology illuminates the way the repetitive themes and leitmotifs in the tales create a set of rules which the text generally follows. The value of these observations is that they help us understand what seems at first glance a highly unusual organization, since *The Nights* obeys none of the rules of time and narration that play themselves out in novels, short stories, confessions, or any other familiar prose genre.

Ghazoul's structuralist approach is not only justified by the particular text which is her main focus; it also places her in the midst of an interesting intellectual trend in criticism within the Arab world. In no way is Ghazoul ideological or narrow about her method. Her critical approach is demanded by the work and not by external concerns, and she shows no compunction about pointing out discrepancies in the system she constructs, or raising issues of power and gender (read sex and politics) when called for — although in contrast to another recent work on *The Nights*, Fedwa Malti-Douglas's *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*, concerns of power and gender arise out of textual explorations instead of monopolising the focus. To read European high structuralist criticism today, the reader is often struck with the pointlessness of the observations being made, and the sterile nature of the various triangles, charts, and diagrams taking up huge swipes of the page. But Ghazoul's study is almost completely free of such problems. Only occasionally, in the last third of the book, do her comparisons fall flat, and there is none of the fascination with technical jargon that reached its zenith with the rise of deconstruction. Working in a tradition that includes Nasr Hamid Abu Zeid, Olfat Al-Rubi, Gaber Asfour, Abdel-Fattah Kilito, Abdullah Ibrahim, and Ceza Kassem, Ghazoul's work is part of a critical canon continuing to adopt to the Arab context the science of studying the internal components of literary narratives.

At a panel discussion of his book *Culture and Imperialism*, conducted at a meeting of the Modern Language Association of North America in December 1993, and published nine months later in the US-based academic journal *Social Text*, Edward Said referred to a conversation with Noam Chomsky in which the two expressed some confusion over Arab critics' continuing interest in structuralism and its offshoots. Said reports that Chomsky came back from a trip to Egypt impressed by the way local intellectuals were fixated with one of two things. According to Chomsky, everyone he met was either addressing Islamism (not terribly surprising when one remembers what was going on in Egypt in 1993), or "going on about postmodernism". Said adds: "It's incomprehensible. They are much more interested in the latest twists in Derrida."



Illustration by Jiri Behounek, reproduced from *Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp*, Hamlyn, London

Both Said and Chomsky make cameos in *Nocturnal Poetics* in the form of citations of their early work. To see these references today, one is struck by how far the two have traveled in their very similar intellectual trajectories. Concern with issues related to structuralism and post-structuralism, semiotics, generative grammar, and linguistics have been almost completely eclipsed by examinations of politics, imperialism, postcoloniality, and global capitalism. Meanwhile, the Arab critics mentioned above — and many others — have gone in the opposite direction. (Ghazoul points out in introducing her reading of Mahfouz's *Arabian Nights and Days* that Arab critics "have generally emphasised the political component inherent in the narrative.") After being forced to confront nothing but political issues for decades due to a series of independence struggles and wars with Israel, Arab critics for over a decade now have been moving deeper and deeper into a complicated and historically rooted exploration of textual issues and structuralist and post-structuralist methodologies.

This trend can even be understood as a concern with a higher politics, a will to show that Arabic narrative contains all the same complexities and intricacies of the West's "great books." If this is among the goals of *Nocturnal Poetics*, it succeeds impressively, for by taking us around the world and through history, we are reminded — without ever leaving textual concerns — of the power of stories to endure, transform, adapt, and regenerate.

Reviewed by **Hosam Aboul-Ela**

Plain Talk

I am a great believer in the role of art education in creating an awareness of and taste for the fine arts. This is why I agreed to be a member of the board of the Faculty of Art Education. I am neither an artist nor an art critic, nor even an educator but I deemed it an honour to be asked to serve on the board. I am also a believer in the social function of art.

While the original task of the Faculty is to produce art teachers for the schools, it has embarked on what one might call extra-curricula activities. These have taken the form of special workshops, seminars and conferences dealing with varied topics. I was once instrumental in arranging a workshop, with a specialised agency in America, on the use of art in teaching scholastic subjects, including, of all things, mathematics. Another workshop dealt with child drama.

The Faculty has already distinguished itself by the scientific conferences it holds every year. This week the Faculty held its 6th such conference, with the innovative title "The Present and the Future of Art Education and the Challenges of the 21 Century."

I had the pleasure and honour of moderating the inaugural session which dealt with the role of art in society. There were speakers from different walks of life. I got the ball rolling by bringing up a few controversial points which helped to liven the session. It is always said that environmental pollution is at its worst in industrial countries and that with the process of industrialisation embarked on by developing countries they will suffer the same fate of industrially developed countries. It was deplorable that some European countries dispose of their industrial residues in developing countries.

An interesting point raised by Farid Khamis was the importance of the artist in industry. In his particular activity, that is producing carpets, the artist plays a vital role since he is the one who develops the designs. But designs should meet the taste of the would-be buyer. What appeals to the Germans is different to what appeals to the American, or the Japanese or the French. It is around the purchaser that the whole process depends. In many ways this is like the information process. In this process there are four components, the source, the message, the channel and the receiver. In the field of information it is the receiver who decides both the message and the channel.

The discussion developed into an examination of the visual pollution resulting from ugly architecture, street dirt, ugly colours and hideous shop-fronts. It was mentioned that architecture constitutes a first approach to art since everyone comes in to contact with buildings. Advertising is also an element in the creation of visual pollution. The audiences were reminded of a law proposed by the Higher Council of Arts and Literature in the sixties, making it compulsory to earmark two per cent of the cost of any government building for the arts. Newly built offices display murals, sculptures and paintings.

Different committees discussed other issues, but it would be difficult to cover them here. The conference also had exhibitions of works by the teaching staff of the Faculty as well as activities of the students themselves. Prizes were also given to star students. It was altogether a wonderful artistic gathering, the result of the activities of both staff and students, led by the Dean Dr Soliman Mahmoud Hassan and Vice-Dean Dr Abla Osman.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Nor harsh, nor grating

Qadaya Fikriya (Intellectual Issues), ed Mahmoud El-Alim, double issue 15/16, published by Dar Qadaya Fikriya

Is contemporary Arab thought in crisis? Mahmoud Amin El-Alim has no doubt about there being a crisis that manifests itself on all levels of our reality — cultural, political and economic. As to those who cite the rise in numbers of schools and university graduates and so on as evidence that there is no crisis, they only reinforce the status quo, albeit unconsciously. Others — notably Mohamed Abed El-Gabri — not only assert that there is a crisis in Arab thought but attribute it to the stagnation of the Arab mind and its unchanging genetic and structural traits, including its rejection of objective causality and its upholding of the fundamentalist paradigm and juristical deduction.

In the editorial of the most recent issue of the quarterly *Qadaya Fikriya* (Intellectual Issues), Mahmoud El-Alim contends that the crisis of contemporary Arab thought is historically inseparable from the crisis of Arab reality. He traces it back to the early 19th century and the encounter between the Arab's backward reality and the civilised European reality that had arrived with its colonial thought, its armies and savants. Yet the Arab mind, backward though it was, bore the seeds of its own rejuvenation and intellectual development which were to be nipped in the bud by the advent of colonialism. Hence the feature El-Alim considers constant in Arab theoretical thought, namely the ambivalent, tortured relationship between the Arab backward self and the advanced Western other. But the confusion is not explicable merely in terms of the underdeveloped/developed dichotomy. For the Western other — with his scientific and economic achievements — is, in relation to us, a colonial invader. And Arab thought, like Arab reality, in its backwardness experiences all the neuroses of dependency. Thus, "development", be it in the domain of intellect or reality, is tantamount, almost, to a "development of under-development".

Arab thought has never been able to provide answers to the questions posed by reality and has always been alienated from these questions. There is the duality of thought versus reality in its interaction with the duality of a dependent, politically/authority-dictated modernism versus traditional structures and values. As a theoretical solution to these intertwined, confused dualities (commonly referred to as "authenticity" versus "modernity"), the trend of eclecticism emerged. It is noticeable that among enlightenment thinkers and their disciples, the balance is tipped towards the rational and the modernist.

There are also attempts, as with Al-Arawi, to eschew altogether the eclectic solution to the authenticity/modernity duality by unreservedly embracing the option of Westernisation and, hence, of polarisation. Diametrically opposed to this trend is the equally polarised thought, propagated by Hassan Hanafi, among others, which calls for the reinforcement of the religious self through a cultural rupture with the Western other.

Between these two polarised/polarising projects there lies what one may refer to as the rationalist or scientific project with its many off-shoots. Mahmoud El-Alim sees this project represented in the modern approach to religious thought, as in the works of Khaled Mohamed Khaled, Amin El-Khouli, Said El-Ashmawi and Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid — though some may not agree that there is a great deal that is scientific or rational in the intellectual principles of these thinkers, who in any case differ markedly from each other. El-Alim also identifies this project in the nationalist, scientific objective thought of Gamal Hemdan, Ahmed Bahaeddin, Yassin El-Hafez and Fouad Zakaria (though perhaps the latter's most recent writings do not bracket him as nationalist). Yet again, El-Alim detects the same trend in the scientific socialist thought of Hassan Marwa, Mahdi Amel, Sadeq Galal El-Azm, Elias Morcos, and Samir Amin among others.

Here, we may legitimately ask whether there is not a certain amount of eclecticism in bracketing together Khaled Mohamed Khaled, Gamal Hemdan and Samir Amin within one and the same rationalist, scientific project, despite the incompatibility of their epistemological principles, and despite their contradictory stances in practical situations. What, for example, can there be in common between Khaled Mohamed Khaled who reneged on his refusal of separating religion from the state/government and who hero-worships Margaret Thatcher, on the one hand, and Samir Amin, whose well-known views are contrary to conservative liberalism. And do all these try to go beyond dualities and eclecticism? Certainly, their declared respect for knowledge, reason and democracy is premised on tenets that are widely divergent in their definitions. But although these thinkers belong to very different intellectual projects and ideologies, they can nevertheless collaborate and work together on specific social and cultural issues posed by reality — and perhaps this is what El-Alim is trying to bring out.

El-Alim then tackles the crisis of Arab thought within the current world order. Among the features of this order is the fall of the Soviet socialist paradigm and the dissolution of the socialist order, for he considers the Soviet Union and its satellites socialist regimes in essence, despite the oppression of the proletariat and the bureaucratic control of them. Other features include the hegemony of world capitalism lead by the US and the scientific and technological revolution bringing about a qualitative change in knowledge and production. These features have left their imprint on Arab thought which is no longer maneuvering between two world camps .Now it has come to adopt notions of globalism— which do not so much imply the unity of human civilisation as much as the capitalist hegemony over the world. This has led to a dual polarisation in contemporary Arab thought. On one hand there is a trend of total submission to the logic of this global reality, of striving to adapt to it while muting the national cultural identity. Born of this is a rationalist, operational utilitarian trend characterised by the dominance of individualism, the focus on details, the technological approach and stiff competitiveness (here El-Alim uses "rationalism" in the pluralistic sense of the word, for there are many forms of rationalism).

As to the other form of polarisation, it is a religious, fundamentalist one — a moral, cultural reaction to backwardness and dependency. This trend covers two positions, a total rejection of western civilisation and political systems, and the terrorist movements which operate without comprehensive theory. Either approach is simply a symptom of the crisis in Arab thought and reality.

El-Alim's thought-provoking and perceptive editorial provides the framework for the studies included in the volume. The first section deals with theory in general. The first article here is a diagnosis of Arab thought, according to which we are told that vis-à-vis the idea of freedom we have adopted a terrorist approach, that our approach to secularism is theological, that our rationalism is replete with superstition, that our call for Marxism and socialism is very totalitarian, and as for Islam, we call for it haughtily, which is not in keeping with the spirit of monotheism. After the simplistic, negative and colour blind diagnosis, the writer offers a magical recipe that would turn darkness into light. He suggests that the proponents of various intellectual projects should re-think their relationship with existence and truth, that we should all awaken from our dogmatic slumber, emerge from our intellectual cocoons and deconstruct the postulations. It is, in effect, a panacea for all intellectual ills.

Then comes an article criticising anti-rationalist thought and theocratic, animistic thinking. We also find a number of studies of aspects of Abed El-Gabri's work, as well as of El-Arawi. The volume also includes a number of articles geared towards the intellectual situation in North Africa. Among these are a study on "The Shortcomings of North African Thought", an overview of historical/historicist writing in Algeria, and an analysis of the cultural conflict between Self and Other in the same country.

The second section of the volume, entitled "On Religious Thought", explores the dichotomy of tradition versus modernity, the idea of sovereignty and the strategies of the Islamist movement, among other issues. The third section revolves around economic, political and sociological thought. It contains an in-depth study by Ramzi Zaki on the expansion of global capitalism in the periphery. There are also two studies written from a Marxist point of view. The first, by Karim Marwa, takes a critical stance on various approaches as well as critiquing Marxist thought and pin-pointing the ailments that have beset it. Rifaat El-Said's article also offers a self-critique, deconstructing concepts deeply entrenched in the minds of those who for long lived under the ideological shadow of the former Soviet Union. But El-Said constructs an unjustified structural relationship between the official ideology of the Soviet bureaucracy and the principles of classical Marxist thinking. He proposes a revision of the foundations of state and revolution in Marxism that clearly draws on liberalism.

The fourth section, "Education and Culture", provides a discussion of the problematics of pedagogical thought, the philosophy of knowledge, and the dialectics of power, revolution and rationalism. Literary criticism is given ample space in this section — which is in keeping with the importance it has in the editor's output and is also justified by the fact that this form of criticism is a significant link between theory, creativity and public reception.

In conclusion, this volume, with its wide range of topics and broad spectrum of schools, makes for a comprehensive panorama of the most important trends in contemporary Arab thought, allowing for a productive — sometimes intense though never shrill — discussion between them.

Reviewed by **Ibrahim Fathi**

From Robinson Crusoe to Omar Khayyam

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews a selection of the most interesting titles to have appeared in the past month

• *Sharaf* (Honour), Sonallah Ibrahim. Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1997

This, the sixth novel by Sonallah Ibrahim, created a controversy a few months ago when some of its chapters were published in the literary weekly *Akhbar Al-Adab*. A writer by the name Fathi Fadl had claimed that parts of the novel bore a great deal of resemblance to his memoirs entitled *Al-Zinzana* (The Prison Cell), published a few years ago.

Here, Ibrahim resorts to a favourite technique, that of collage. The novel contains many political and economic facts and figures, is replete with references to international banks and multi-nationals — all woven into a narrative set in a prison (with the exception of the first chapter where a young man kills a European homosexual who had tried to rape him). The young man is tried and given a life-sentence.

There is no doubt that *Sharaf* is an accomplished panorama of all the changes and transformations in Egyptian reality in the last years.

• *Aswat Marrakesh* (*Die Stimmen Von Marrakesch*), Elias Canetti, tr Kamel Youssef Hussein. Cairo: Dar Sharqiat, 1997

Nobel-prize winner Elias Canetti was educated in England, Switzerland and Austria. He obtained his PhD in Chemistry from Vienna University. Meanwhile, he has authored a long novel, three collections of articles, a huge study on the phenomenon of collectivity written over a period of 25 years, a number of plays and an autobiography.

His one work set in an Arab context, *Aswat Marrakesh* (*Die Stimmen Von Marrakesch*), is a travelogue. In the introduction, translator Kamel Youssef Hussein describes the book as being closer to the architectonics of music, and also as a text that captures the pulse and rhythms of the city with great accuracy.

Canetti's observant eye misses nothing: the tableaux of the market, the look on the faces of camels, the story-tellers, the clerks, the blind men's cries, the doors of the old city, the woman lurking behind the window. Yet, at no point does Canetti exoticise Marrakesh; rather, he empathises with the city and is invariably humane in his observations.

• *Mawsouat Tarikh Masr Abr Al-Usour: Masr Al-Qadima* (Encyclopedia of Egyptian History: Ancient Egypt), Abdel-Aziz Saleh, Gamal Mukhtar et al. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997

"Ancient Egypt" is one of the volumes of the Encyclopedia of Egyptian History, compiled by the History Committee of the Supreme Council of Culture. The six sections of this volume cover the history of Ancient Egypt from pre-Dynastic times to Roman rule.

• *Alf Layla Wa Layla* (The Arabian Nights), the Calcutta second edition of 1839. Cairo: Cultural Palaces Organisation, Treasures Series, 1997

The "Treasures Series" of the Cultural Palaces Organisation has reprinted a rare edition of *The Arabian Nights*, namely the Calcutta second edition, first published in four volumes between 1839 and 1842. This was based on an Egyptian handwritten manuscript brought to India by a British major.

The Calcutta edition is among the most important versions of *The Arabian Nights* since it contains a number of tales nowhere else included. The book recently published by the "Treasures Series" is the second quarter of the first volume and covers nights from 220 to 371. With the publication of the Calcutta edition in a heavily subsidised issue one may say that *The Arabian Nights* has finally become accessible.

• *Muqadima Fi Tarikh Al-Riyadiyat* (An Introduction to the History of Mathematics), Abdel-Azim Anis. Cairo: Dar Al-Mustaqbal, 1997

In the introduction to this book, the well-known leftist thinker Abdel-Azim Anis writes that the volume is based on a series of lectures on the history of mathematics he gave students of the vocational diploma section of the Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University. The book charts the history of mathematics from the Babylonian and Ancient Egyptian civilisations all the way to the twentieth century, passing through the Greek and Arab civilisations and the Renaissance.

Among the figures Dr Anis tackles in-depth are Al-Khawarizmi, Omar Khayyam and Ibn Haytham (in the Arab-Islamic era), as well as such European figure as Isaac Newton and Karl Fredrick.

•*Abniya Mutatayira* (Flying Structures), Edwar El-Kharrat. Beirut: Dar Al-Adaab, 1997

Although Edwar El-Kharrat's *Abniya Mutatayira* (Flying Structures) is the second novel in a trilogy, the vagaries of publishing in the Arab world have meant that the first novel, *Raqraqat Al-Ahlam Al-Milhiya* (Ripples of Salt Dreams) and the third, *Hariq Al-Akhyila* (Fire of Fantasies) were both published before it, in 1994. Happily, given this history, each of these novel can be read unto itself, as well as a part of trilogy.

• *Fi Mustawtanat Al-Iqab* (*In Der Straffkolonie*), Franz Kafka, tr Kamel Youssef Hussein. Cairo: Dar Sharqiyat, 1997

The importance of this volume lies in the fact that it brings together translations of Kafka's novel *In Der Straffkolonie* and his short story *Banat Awa Wa Arab* (Foxes and Arabs). For as the translator explains, these two works are at the core of the controversy among Arab critics about Kafka's political stance vis-à-vis Zionism. While one group of these critics claim that Kafka, being Jewish writer, strongly sympathised with Zionist thought, another asserts that the writer was a self-avowed enemy of Zionism. The translator thus decided to render into Arabic these two works from which either team quarries its evidence, so that the Arab reader may be able to judge for him/herself.

• *Qiraat Al-Adab Abr Al-Thaqafat* (A Cross-cultural Reading of Literature), Marie-Therese Abdel-Messih. Cairo: Cultural Palaces Organisation, 1997

In this volume, Marie-Therese Abdel-Messih provides a cross-cultural reading of Arab heritage in the mirror of the Western Other, analysing elements of intertextuality. Among the comparative studies in this book is a chapter on *Hai Ibn Yakzan* and *Robinson Crusoe* where the author seeks to answer the question whether the relationship between the two fictional works is one of literary similarity/kinship or intertextuality. Abdel-Messih also devotes a chapter to two contemporary novels: Somalese writer Nureddin Farag's *Al-Laban Al-Hilw Wal-Murr* (Milk, Sweet and Bitter) and Egyptian novelist Alaa El-Dib's *Zahr Al-Laymoun* (Lemon Blossoms).

• *Sabil Al-Shaks Wa Qissas Ukhra* (The Individual's Path and Other Stories), Abdou Gubair. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997

While Abdou Gubair's novel *Sabil Al-Shaks* was first published in Beirut in 1982, it is reprinted here with a number of previously unpublished short stories.

• *Qamis Wardi Farigh* (An Empty Pink Shirt), Nora Amin. Cairo: Dar Sharqiyat, 1997

Known for her two collection of short stories, Nora Amin here turns her hand to the novel. *Qamis Wardi Farigh* (An Empty Pink Shirt), in the words of the publisher, "subverts your expectations... It is a text that recreates the identity of its author and reflects... the waiting, the waiting for the lover who does not come, the expectancy of breaking the bondage of the novel".



photo: Randa Shaath

By next year, Egypt may have its own gender studies programme at the American University in Cairo. Feminist academics and activists from across the globe gathered for a regional workshop on gender studies to exchange ideas about what it should and shouldn't be. **Mariz Tadros** attended

Different sisters

Don't turn the page in disgust. Ironically, feminism in the West — long touted as the birthplace of the women's movement — is now getting something of a bad name. Are you a feminist? Yes, but... In some ways, Arab women's rights activists are steps ahead. The workshop on gender studies was no exercise in man-hating, male-bashing rhetoric conducted by a group of embittered, neurotic women suffering from an inferiority complex. Nor does *this Western stereotype have much credence in* Egypt. Although Egypt has historically been a pioneer in feminist struggles and ideology, it has no academic programme in which fem*inism, gender and women's issues are studied* on a regional level. It is, however, an exception. Such programmes exist in Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Yemen, and at Birzeit University *in the West Bank... The list goes on.*

Studying women in the Middle East has raised much controversy. While Western feminists are grappling with the dilemma of difference and *diversity* within *feminism, many* Arab feminists both inside and outside the region are debating whether they should "borrow" from Western feminist thought or, rather, develop their own indigenous feminist product. If they opt for the latter, there is still a major issue to be settled: just what is indigenous feminism, and what, if anything, will it resemble?

Sandra Hale, at the gender studies department at the University of California, Los Angeles, argues that it is precisely the dichotomy between "Western" and "Eastern" feminism that has perpetuated the stereotyping of women from both spheres. Western programmes, for instance, are allegedly more concerned with sexuality, and are more woman-centered, entrenched in an ideology of "liberation pedagogy", while their counterparts in the Middle East are thought to be "community/society-oriented, hardly concerned with sexuality and not too thrilled about the Western touchy-feely approach to academia." Hale argues that Western feminists' relationship with women in the region has been particularly problematic because not only have they had to deconstruct the Orientalist and colonialist discourses on Arabs as the "other", but also to deconstruct the "other within" — namely, wom*en in the Middle East.*

All those who attended the workshop criticised the West (including many Western feminists) for the widespread "hysteria over fe*male genital mutilation*", as well as the continued focus on reproductive rights, as if these were the only issues affecting Arab women. Should feminists from the region "rejoice" that some of the taboo issues are finally being addressed openly, albeit as a part of a Western political agenda, or should they downplay the gravity of some of these issues in order to give space for other, *equally* pressing, problems? No consensus was reached.

To shift from the Western feminists' depiction of women as victims of "sexual slavery" *in the Middle East, Hale suggests* that useful gender studies' approaches should posit women as actors, as agents of change within the wider political economy, rather than *merely passive receivers and victims. The* victim approach, she affirms, has commonly characterised some international agencies' approaches to women in development. She *argues that the initiation of so many* domestic-oriented income-generating projects for Sudanese women, "only put women and their productive and reproductive labour at the *service* of the state and of international capital".

Alternatively, Hala Afshar, an Iranian feminist and the founder and director of the Women's Studies Centre at York University in the United Kingdom, argues that she has relied extensively upon personal narratives from women attending the course since their voices have been subsumed or obliterated altogether from traditional history. "What we know is that women have been invisible in all the grand theories and this is why oral history is so important, especially in the Middle Eastern context", she said.

Soheir Morsy, an Egyptian feminist and the director of the gender studies programme at Tufts University in the US, disagrees. "There is always a danger in reducing scholarship to the personal level. It is one thing to talk about feminism in terms of 'the personal is political' — but the political must be theorised, socialised and historicised, not simply be presented as 'this is my personal experience and I'd like to share it'." Or, as one director of a women's studies centre wrote: "A woman's masturbatory experience does not a syllabus make." Morsy contested that women's low rates of participation and appreciation in sciences must be addressed, and a feminist perspective *must be interdisciplinary* to cover not just the humanities but the sciences as well.

Victim feminism — the excessive emphasis on patriarchy in feminist studies — is drawing much criticism. "For one thing, it homogenises women in opposition to men, rather than contextualising them in broader socio-political and global power relations. Besides, women's position alters according to their life cycle, power ranges from when you are a young mother to when you are a mother-in law," said one participant in exasperation.

So to *what extent* can women *in the Middle* East look to the West in their struggle for emancipation and empowerment? Some attendants expressed the struggle they face or fear *when collaborating with the West: If* they criticise manifestations of gender discrimination in their own societies (or, as one attendant asked, "air our dirty linen abroad?"), *they* are *obliged to emphasise* or "*illustrate*" their authenticity or national/regional allegiances so as not to be regarded as traitors.

This is especially problematic when it comes *to looking for funds for the establishment of* gender studies in the Middle East. Many NGOs and centres involved in advocacy work rely entirely on foreign funding, which has raised *suspicions that donors can restrict or or*ient the agendas of women's rights groups.

Concern was voiced, moreover, that many independent international NGOs as well as international development agencies, expect their own agendas to be tied to funds. "It is not coincidental that increasing interest in women's issues coincides with the depoliticising, deradicalising and domesticating of the syllabus. Still, we cannot survive as a centre without foreign money," said Lisa Taraki, a Palestinian feminist from Birzeit University.

But foreign funding is not the only sensitive issue. If feminists in the Middle East use material on women written by Western feminists, should that be regarded as a cultural import? "It is important not to assume that what happens in the West happens in different contexts in the Middle East, but we are an Arab society which has been part of a regional civilization in which we influenced others and vice-versa. So part of what we are importing is our one-time export to the West," suggested Morsy.

The gender studies programmes offered at Birzeit and Sanaa universities have shown that reliance on Western feminist methodology and empirical findings on Middle Eastern women has been problematic. for practical reasons. Because the greater part of the available ma*terial on women in the region is in English*, the Unit for Social Research and Women's Studies at Sanaa University made it a pre-requisite for all students to show high levels of proficiency in the language. Women's studies programmes in Sanaa as well as Birzeit have been confronted with the daunting task of translating material from English to Arabic as well as "Arabising" concepts common in Western feminist discourse.

The same debate over cultural specificity extends to another issue of central importance to the *gender* studies agenda in the *Middle* East: the relationship between Islamic fundamentalism, nationalism and feminism. The Palestinian as well as the Algerian experiences have *protested against* the *authorities'* abandonment of promises made to women once independence was gained. Eileen Kuttab's paper on the Palestinian women's experience *stressed growing gender disparities* after the Oslo agreements, especially in employment opportunities.

Boutheina Cheriet, an Algerian feminist, de*cried the expectation that women should be the* embodiment of a tradition delineated by local patriarchal beliefs. Not only are Algerian women today experiencing the forces of state-*sponsored paternalistic feminism, they* are also confronted with a backlash waged by the fundamentalist movement.

In contrast, Hala Afshar suggested that Islamic feminists in Iran and feminists in the West share a common underlying agenda: "Islamic feminists in Iran argued that the world and especially capitalism sought to objectify women as sex objects. They pointed out that if they couldn't sell a car, you draped a naked woman on it, and it moved. The whole pre-revolutionary experience of women in Iran was that you were harassed by pictures of beautiful women wearing practically nothing." Afshar explained that Islamic feminists felt that, thanks to the veil, they would no longer be the object of the male gaze and would no longer have to live up to any patriarchal expectations of beauty.

"And after all, this is why we [Western feminists] burned our bras in the 1960s and why we rejected make-up, they were both political decisions." Objections to generalisations about all Islamist feminist women in the Middle East on the basis of the Iranian experience were expressed by some attendants, however.

The recommendations made for an adequate gender studies programme in Egypt are expansive; celebrating global sisterhood while recognising differences, exalting feminism while resisting individualism, promoting dialogue between East and West while preserving "an indigenous character", and in*corporating men without losing the feminist* focus: these are but a few.



The notebook

When we married, I moved to Alexandria, into the flat my husband had shared with his mother for over thirty years. It never occurred to me that I could have asked for an apartment of my own. Generally, I had been brought up to have few demands, which suited my new husband fine, since he was not exactly the type who showered his loved ones with expensive little baubles at the *slightest provocation. He was not really* tight with his money, he used to say, just careful.

I was therefore quite surprised when, a few days after our wedding, he announced mysteriously that he had a gift for me. It was a good thing I did not expect shining gilded decorations that would have made my friends green with envy. The present was a worn-out notebook which had belonged to his mother. Knowing my husband's great love and respect for his mother, who had just died, I opened the little booklet with the required reverence. It was divided into several sections and basically spelled out the way she went about her household chores. "I want you to follow her system," my husband whispered lovingly.

Before our marriage, I had made no secret about my utter dislike for domesticity. I could not and had no desire to learn. I held the belief that houses are places where one spends as little time as possible, not shrines in which household gods are adored. I had proved it, after all, by complying with his desire that his *apartment remain exactly as his mother had arranged it. I had re*frained from any comment about what I secretly considered its tackiness, but now I felt that my husband was trying to manipulate me into doing exactly what I had *said* I would not do.

"I'll *start looking for a job tomorrow,*" I said quietly. He argued that, in his family, women did not work, that they all looked after their families. Why, his aunt had refused to get married in order to care for her bachelor brother and, now that he had died, she still lived in the big house and invited the whole family over for lovely Sunday lunches.

I had met his old aunt and had loved her dearly. And her lunches were really delicious. "She is living alone now," I pointed out. "Why don't you ask her to move in with us? I'll go to work and she can make *kubeba* for you every day."

Unfortunately, the aunt had come to love her freedom after all these years of slaving to keep her brother happy. She agreed, however, to spend a couple of days with us. If her favourite nephew was in trouble, she was not one to turn a deaf ear to his cry for help.

She was a tiny woman with a twinkle in her pale blue eyes. She had hardly arrived when my husband began pouring his heart out to her. I was surprised by the importance he attached to household comforts. There was no doubt in my mind that his mother had spoiled him. I kept this observation to myself, however. I did not think it was my place to criticise my husband's mother, who was also the aunt's sister.

The aunt, meanwhile, was listening with a smile. "You'd rather work than look after the house?" she asked mildly. I nodded. "Come with me, we will make a nice cup of tea. I've brought your *husband's favourite cake." I followed her reluctantly to the* kitchen. She looked carefully around, then called my husband. "She can't work in this kitchen," she announced. "It needs total remodelling, a new refrigerator, a modern stove; you should *change the floor tiles and have kitchen cupboards built in from* top to bottom. Have everything painted a bright yellow, it is a happy colour, it will put her in a good mood." I looked at her. She was not smiling, but her eyes were dancing with mischief. *"Mother liked it this way," said my husband sulkily. "She did* not need bright yellow to cook the most delicious meals..."

"Your mother's cooking was appalling, the whole family always said so, with all due respect for my dead sister, of course," *said the aunt. We went through the house.* She found fault with everything. The bathroom was below standards, we needed new tiles on the floor, new fixtures and fittings, lots of built-in cupboards; the three bedrooms had to be completely repainted, the furniture changed and, while he was at it, she said, why not sell the old-fashioned dining room and buy a modern round table with a few chairs?

Another good idea that had just occurred to her was to open the wall between the kitchen and the dining room and make the two rooms into one huge family room where we could cook and entertain at the same time... There were windows that had to be enlarged and balconies that would benefit from being enclosed. Had Jacuzzis been invented in those days, I am sure she would have advised him to install one.

She went on and on, enthusiastically describing what we could do to the flat, disregarding the restraining hand my husband had firmly placed on her arm. "I am sure that your wife will love doing housework in such surroundings. I might even think of moving in with you, when you are finished with the work," she told my bewildered husband, nudging him coyly.

I did not think that giggling at this point was in good taste, but I had a hard time watching my husband's face and restraining myself. "Do you know how much this will cost?" he finally blurted out, looking indignantly at the little old woman. She eyed him innocently. "You did not ask me to solve your financial problems," she said quietly. "All you said was that I had to convince your wife to get on with her household chores; this is what I have been doing." She patted me affectionately.

"Wouldn't you like a new apartment, dear?" Though I didn't really care one way or the other, I nodded vigorously. "Now, if you have financial problems," she continued sweetly, looking at my husband, "why not let her go to work?"

A few days later, when I told my husband that I had found a *job, he did not object.*

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Libyan macaroni

Ingredients:

One chicken cut in 8 parts
300g macaroni (ring shaped)
One onion (diced)
One tsp. crushed garlic
3 large tomatoes (diced)
One pod green chili (finely chopped)
2 tbsp. tomato paste
Butter + salt + pepper + allspice + cinammon

Method:

In a cooking pan, melt the butter and fry golden the onion, then add the garlic and then the chicken parts. Stir fry them until goldened, then add the green chili, the diced tomatoes, the tomato paste and the spices. Stir and add two cups of water, bring to a boil, then simmer over low heat and leave to cook until the chicken parts are almost cooked. Uncover, add three more cups of boiling water, bring to a boil, then add the macaroni and leave it to cook, covered over a low heat. Stir the mixture gently and serve hot with a rich green salad.

P.S: This dish can be cooked with veal or beef cutlets instead of the chicken.

Moushira Abdel-malek

Restaurant review

The absent onion

Nigel Ryan discovers how to halve disappointment

Discreetly, without fanfare, Cairo lost its Swiss Air restaurants. Suddenly there was no more Air. They became simply Swiss *Restaurants, and though the staff and inter*iors of the chain remain pretty much unchanged there has been a certain revamping of the menu, which seemed always to rely a little too heavily on bits of veal in cream sauces that usually featured mushrooms. Time, then, to revisit.

La Chesa is the chain's downtown branch. Not much has changed inside, though the restaurant now boosts a small annexe. The staff are pretty much the same. It still has fretted pine chairs with hearts cut out of the back, cow bells hanging from the ceiling, sketchy, pine-framed prints of scribbled chalets on the walls. The only place where you notice the change is in the menu, which is both more extensive and attempts to add a little variety by including regional *dishes* from Switzerland's Italian-speaking enclave.

One of the most pleasant things about La *Chesa is its salad bar. Things here remain* pretty much the same, a variety of marinaded and fresh ingredients, changing according to season. You simply help your*self, and pay according to the size of plate.* We decided on small salads, followed by apel macaroni and spaghetti ticinese.

For the jaded restaurant reviewer, menus *that include long lists of ingredients in the* description of dishes are a god-send since one can account for a goodly proportion of the required copy simply by repeating in*gredients. For the restaurateur, however,* they are something of a bind. Imagine, you have your new, expensively printed menu, with detailed descriptions of everything *you serve, down to itemised garnishes.* And then, for some reason, you run out of "tender minced veal". But one of your customers has just ordered spaghetti ticinese, and the menu states quite clearly that this is what is included. What do you do? Well, at La Chesa, they simply cut up an escalope into bite-size pieces and stir it into the pasta.

I chose apel macaroni simply because the long list of ingredients intrigued — potatoes and pasta, with smoked veal, in a cream-based sauce, with crisp onion rings and apple compote. *Curiousity*, which never did for cats, is equally not the forte of the faint-hearted. I ordered.

Initial disappointment — no crispy onion *rings, no compote — was halved with the* arrival of the latter, slices of poached apple in a small earthenware dish.

Heavy food, and in quantity. Neither of *us finished our allotted pasta dishes.* The salads, though, were excellent, with a particularly fine mixture of marinaded cauliflower and finely chopped peppers. It may *not sound inspired but it was.* Together with two fruit juices, the bill came to just under LE70. The orange juice, incidentally, was blood red and utterly delicious. Service *is as friendly as ever,* and *no one could* ever fault those Swiss-trained smiles.

La Chesa, 21, Adli Street, Downtown. Tel 393 9360

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

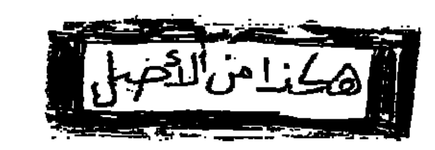
Across

1. French military cap (4)
6. Make headway (4)
10. Quarrelsome woman; she-fox (5)
11. Calumniator (3)
13. Symbol for peace (5)
15. Lifeless (5)
16. Bulgarian monetary unit (3)
17. Was examined again after failing (5)
18. Title of respect (3)
19. Incident (7)
22. Room in a harem (3)
23. Peace-making (7)
25. Small falcon (7)
27. Similar (2)
28. Cereal used in bread making and fodder (3)
30. Symbol for "cobalt" (2)
31. Cloth cap (5)
34. Alas' load (5)
37. Sonnet (4)
38. Over (2)
39. Negation (2)
40. Parlour or kitchen (4)
41. Stare angrily; brilliance (5)
44. Overweight (5)
46. Sun God (2)
47. Baldmoney (3)
49. Prep. of location (2)
50. Dialect of East End (7)
54. Splash with mud or slander (7)
58. Miss Gardner (3)
60. Plant producers (7)
62. Scandinavian monetary unit (3)
63. Jab (5)
65. Equality (3)
66. The Tempter (5)
68. Wheat meal; soft powder from farinaceous roots (5)
69. Elevated trains (3)
70. Throw out (5)
71. Certain medical specialists, abb. (4)
72. Rotunda (4)

Down

1. Peptide formed in blood after injury and causing sensation of pain (5)
2. Put to use; bring into play (5)
3. Through (3)
4. Grave; ardent; poignant (7)
5. Makes (4)
6. Moorish (7)
7. Spanish cheer (3)
8. Shield protecting eyes from sun (5)
9. Sidestep (5)
10. Gripping instrument (4)
11. Pilot (5)
12. Arouse; call up spirit from the dead (5)
14. And others, L. 2 wds (4)
20. Symbol for "platinum" (2)
21. Prefix indicating "reversal" (2)
24. Identify; characteristic (7)
26. Outpouring; rapids (7)
29. Old form of "you" (2)
31. Quagmire (3)
32. Slipper fish (3)
33. Lower extremity (3)
34. Court; serenade (3)
35. Part of L.A. (3)
36. Deer (3)
42. Foresters (7)
43. Us (2)
45. Predisposed (7)
47. Short-sighted person (5)
48. Employers (5)
50. Baby elephant or whale (4)
51. Unfertilised ovum (5)
52. Statute (5)
53. Expression of hesitation 92)
55. Symbol for "praseodymium" (2)
56. Effigy (5)
57. Obliterate (5)
58. Live in temporarily 94)
61. 40 Across divider (4)
64. Destroy by fire internal fittings of house; extract essence of book (3)
67. Past (3)

Last week's solution





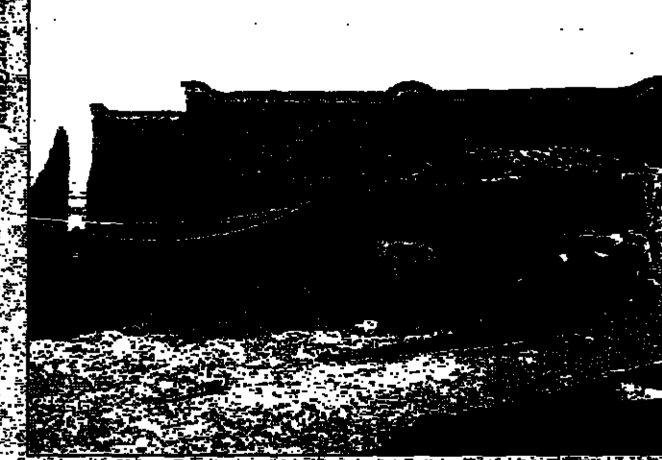
An entire culture is under threat in a village associated with the art of Hassan Fathy and Shadi Abdel-Salam. **Nawal Hassan** pleads for the life of El-Gourna

A village's right to live

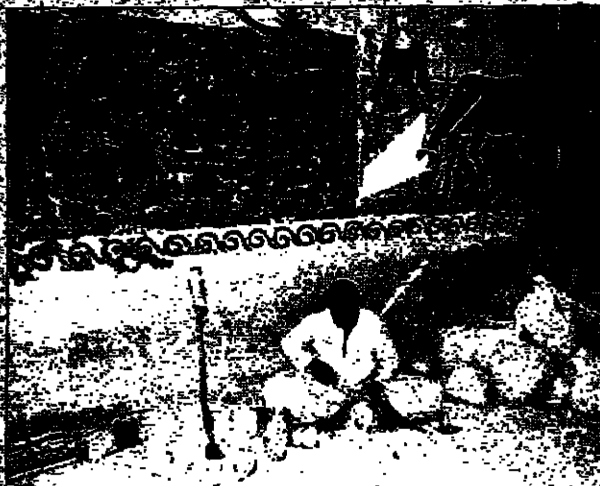
El-Gourna, the village on the west bank of Luxor, is in danger of disappearing forever. The Antiquities Department seeks to turn the area into an open-air museum and empty it of its population. El-Gourna is a vibrant community, rich in cultural heritage which attracts visitors for the beauty of its vernacular adobe (mud-brick) architecture, its magnificent landscape, the abundance of artisan activity which takes place in homes and in the village streets, the traditional daily activities, and the hospitality of its people. Visitors walking up the village paths leading to the Tombs of the Nobles are attracted, as if by a magnet, to the living. They delight in seeing the activities of this farming and artisan community which makes their visit to the monuments doubly interesting. As they pass the children coming back from school or the women on their doorsteps embroidering cotton scarves or setting out the local sun-bread, or *aish shamsi*, in trays in their courtyard, or the artisan polishing statues of the deities in the side streets, or the boys winding their way up the steep paths on the cliffs with their barrels of water carried on donkey-drawn carts, the culture of Ancient Egypt becomes vibrant and meaningful to them. It is the Gournawi living traditions that make this entry possible into the glorious history of Ancient Egypt. What a tragic mistake would it be to think that tourists are only interested in tombs and temples.



Artists' friends: Sheikh Ali and his sister, by Effat Nagui



Too beautiful to be lost: A village house



Endangered livelihood: Artisan carving alabaster vases

Egyptians as well as tourists can appreciate that the beauty of the landscape and monuments is enhanced by the presence of the indigenous population who are the retainers of the genuine customs, beliefs, folklore, and identity of the place.

The village is an integral part of Egypt's history, old as well as new. Although the inhabitants make their mundane living from selling handicrafts to tourists today, it was the Gournawis who, in the late 19th century, discovered a cache of royal mummies in a cave in their hills. This was how the Pharaonic treasures came to light.

Artistic revival: Old and new El-Gourna have been immortalised forever in Shadi Abel Salam's classic film *Al-Mumia* (The Night of Counting the Years.) and in Architect Hassan Fathi's book: *Gourna, A Tale of Two Villages*.

It was Fathi who pioneered ideas of building with local materials and methods. His work earned him 12 international awards including the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Louis Sullivan Award, given by the International Union for Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen, which created the Hassan Fathi Institute in Rome.

But years of neglect followed since Fathi's time and El-Gourna suffered the encroachment of new buildings. The Ministry of Education pulled down the original school and built a concrete building and the police added its own station. However, Hassan Fathi's El-Gourna is still visited by admirers of his architecture from all over the world.

The idea of turning this village into a centre for learning about vernacular architecture and village development is still alive. Local as well as foreign theatrical groups hope to utilise the theatre and help repair El-Gourna and build its community centres.

Old and new El-Gourna are very much alive, tied together in cultural symbiosis. Numerous professors and students of architecture from Cairo and Ain Shams Universities, the School of Fine Arts and foreign universities have come to study Hassan Fathi's legacy and sketch the gentle architecture of the houses of old El-Gourna.

From 1945 to 1967, the Ministry of Culture provided scholarships for teachers of fine arts and their students to spend two months painting the landscape, villages, and the bas-reliefs and paintings in the tombs and temples. Many Egyptian well-known painters participated in this experience: Tahia Halim, Salah Taher, Effat Nagui, Ingi Aflatoun, Gazibia Sirry and before them, Mohamed Nagui, a great painter whose works are still on display in his little-known museum behind Luxor's Mövenpick Hotel on the desert road

The venue for such creative experience was Sheikh Ali's mud-brick hotel in old El-Gourna, which accommodated the original Chicago House, one of the first archaeological centres to be established in El-Gourna.

Sheikh Ali, the grand old man of El-Gourna, was renowned for his hospitality. He built a *marsam*, or art studio for artists in the courtyard of his hotel, then added a wing for archaeologists.

Since the owner's regretted demise, it is no longer possible to get a beer at Sheikh Ali's, but the terrace-courtyard still affords the most beautiful view of the Nile's west bank, with the green fields and colossi of Memnon gracing the background and the lovely houses decorated with paintings of the *hajj* straddling up the village's cliffs.

The idea of reviving the *marsam* was taken up some years ago by an American woman artist who hoped to bring American and European artists to El-Gourna to work with Egyptian artists and students. The venue has had its moments of glory. Royalties wined and dined there, including Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan and Prince Henrik of Denmark.

Recently, students from Antioch University attended a whole course on Ancient Egyptian history and art given by the late Dr. Abdel-Aziz Sadeq and his wife, the Egyptologist Cynthia Shikhullslami.

Uncertain future: El-Gourna currently faces the threat of irreversible transformation. Current plans call for the entire population to be evacuated from a total of 1,500 houses and moved to new villages that were originally built for flood victims in 1993.

Later on, all hotels and houses situated on the road separating the agricultural fields from the mountains will be turned into offices and rest houses for the Tourist Police, the Antiquities Department and other government agencies.

The operation has already started in a low-key, step-by-step approach. Some 250 families were moved to new homes. Their houses were destroyed by bulldozers and pickaxes, leaving behind a mound of broken bricks and dust. This is a sad scene. Dust from the adobe bricks flies about, settling on passing tourists and shop displays.

When the bulldozer was first used, the locals were rightly indignant. They had been denied the use of such heavy equipment when they needed to carve paths into the mountain. It was quickly realised that the bulldozers were doing damage to neighbouring houses and tombs. Since then they have been replaced with teams of men wielding pickaxes.

How do El-Gourna's inhabitants feel about all that? According to a recent survey, most families feel a strong bond to their homes, which belonged to their parents and grandparents, and are willing to put up with the primitive conditions and restrictions on expansion. Most families depend for their livelihood on tourism. Some own shops. Others work in alabaster workshops, carving statues, lamps, boxes and objets d'art from marble and other stones. Scores sell various goods to tourists, from fly whisks to head gear and other handicrafts. Women embroider scarves and shawls and fashion sequined dolls which their daughters sell to tourists.

A few specialised craftsmen carve beautiful replicas of bas-relief from the tombs of Ramose and Nakht. Weavers make simple kelims from wool. All these people will lose their income when they are moved to new villages situated 10 kilometres away.

The government plans to open shops on the main road leading to the antiquity sites. Such shops will not benefit the poorer freelance artisans and may actually annoy tourists who are already over-exposed to stop and shop tour guides.

Perhaps only those El-Gourna villagers who are engaged in the formal sector in hotels and restaurants on the east bank of Luxor will not be harmed by these plans. Those working in hotels and cafeterias on the west bank will lose their jobs.

The future of the operators of traditional sailing boats, or feluccas, and ferries is also uncertain.

With the introduction of electricity in the 1960s, the Gournawis were suddenly launched into the 20th century. The graceful silhouette of women bearing water jugs disappeared and was replaced with water barrels hauled on donkey-drawn carts. This access to large quantities of water suddenly became a problem. The Antiquities Department does not allow piped water or drainage cisterns for fear of leakage and damage to the tombs. Piped water, the Gournawis are quick to point out, is only available for foreign archaeological missions and Local Council members.

In the absence of a sewage system, refuse water is dumped onto the streets or into empty crevices. Yes, water and drainage is a problem. Yet for every problem there are solutions which can be found, short of moving out an entire community. Alternative scenarios can be studied.

Various donor countries are currently engaged in the design and construction of large scale water and sewage projects all over Egypt.

For instance, the Danish government is undertaking a project in Esna to install a waste water and sanitation system at a cost of LE126 million. It is certainly worthwhile to conduct a feasibility study to examine ways of preventing waste water from damaging the tombs.

No price can be too high for the protection of our antiquities and heritage. El-Gourna deserves to live.

The writer is president of the Association for the Urban Development of Islamic Cairo, director of the Centre for Egyptian Civilisation Studies and a former member of the Committee of Folk Art of the Higher Council of Culture

A marvel of marble

Beni Suef is developing a marble cave for tourism, but whistle-blowers suspect foul play. **Fatemah Farag** reports

That Beni Suef has marble is no news. The quiet, Upper Egypt governorate has marble to spare. Streaked but glorious, cold but true, quarries and truckloads of it.

What most of us, including Beni Suef inhabitants, do not know is that the governorate has a Marble Cave — Kahf of Wadi Sanour — which is the third largest in the Middle East, surpassed only by the caves of Gaeeta and Qadetha in Lebanon.

"What?" and "who?" were among the answers received by *Al-Ahram Weekly* when trying to find the whereabouts of the Kahf.

The site was discovered in 1992 by accident. Miners digging for marble exploded a rock and walked into natural history: A marble cave, 50 metres underground, complete with stalagmites and stalactites (upward and downward protrusions, respectively).

Authorities informed, official expeditions were arranged and the location was declared a protected area.

For a while, newspapers hailed the discovery and public figures visited the site. Eventually, the public interest died down and the cave seemed set to reclaim its former state of subterranean obscurity. This, however, was not to be.

A Beni Suef resident, Emaddedin Zeid, filed a lawsuit against the Beni Suef Governorate and a contractor, *Hajj* Rashidi Atwa, claiming that the governorate has allowed the contractor to damage the cave and haul away marble illegally.

Hard to find: Accessible only via a 50 km trail of sand and rock, the cave is unreachable except by sturdy trucks or four-wheel drive vehicles.

Riad Abdel-Karim, a geography student from the village of Sanour, visited the area and was impressed: "The cave is really marvelous, with huge stalagmites and stalactites which are a light shade of yellow and almost transparent. They tinkle like crystal if you tap on them." According to an information sheet provided by the Beni Suef Governorate, the cave is 30 million years old, oval-shaped, and covers an area of approximately 500 square metres.

For all its hidden beauty, the cave does not lend itself easily to inspection. "It is very dangerous. In fact, I went there with my professor to see if a school trip could be arranged and we decided against it," says Abdel-Karim, who enumerated other problems: the bumpy car ride of four or five hours, the hazardous wooden steps that take you steeply down into the cave and the lack of light inside.

"Most people in the area have never heard of the cave because it is so difficult to get there," adds Abdel-Karim wistfully.

Following the cave's discovery, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) contracted *Hajj* Atwa to clear the cave's entrance of jutting rock, improve accessibility to the area, and, generally, prepare the site for its new role as a tourist attraction.

According to officials, the contractor performed these tasks admirably. General Abdel-Meguid Ahmed, head of the Beni Suef Quarries Project says Atwa has done an "excellent job" which includes the establishment of a "very nice rest house with air-conditioning".

Abdel-Karim also liked the work done by the contractor. "The *Hajj* has done a great job. He had to dig 80 metres deep so that cars can drive down to the entrance."

Voices of dissent: Critics of the work include Karam Saber, of the Al-Ard Human Rights Centre, which handles the case against the Governorate and the contractor.

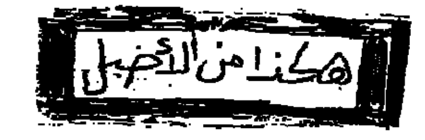
"We first heard about the case when three guards who were dismissed from the project came and talked to us. They said that the explosions carried out at the lower part of the cave damaged certain areas... they reported this to the governorate on 31 October 1995. The case was referred to the public prosecutor. The latter has not yet announced the findings of investigations... The guards were dismissed on 1 January 1996."

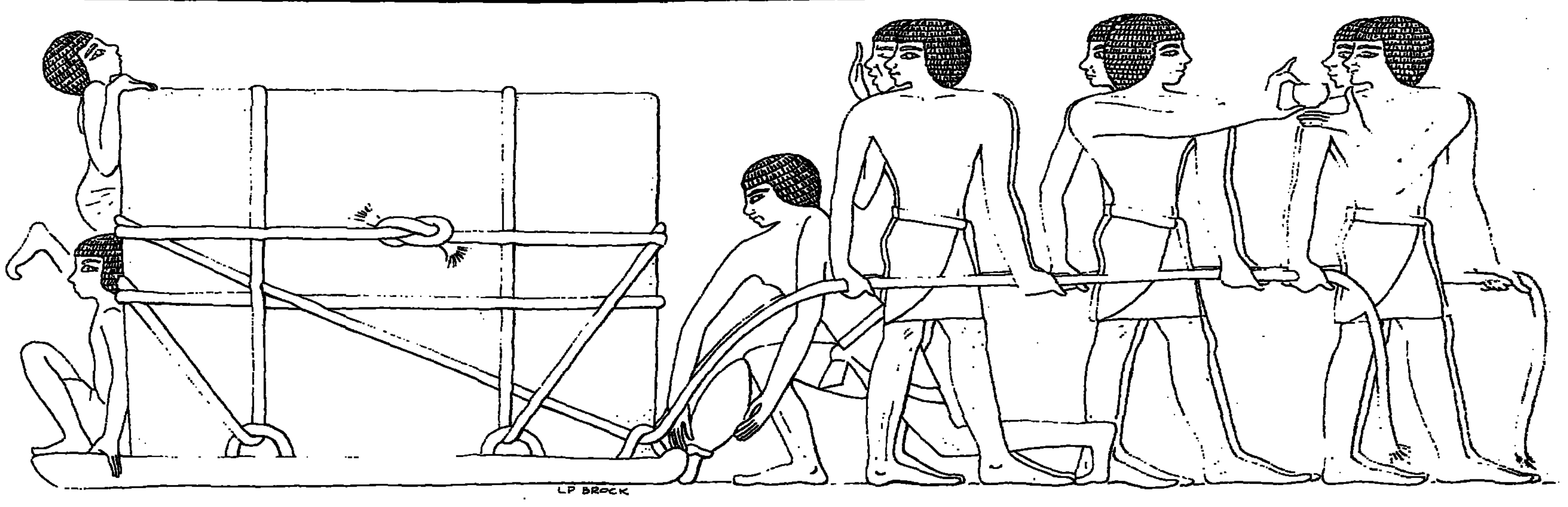
Saber points out that the use of explosives was not allowed by the contract between the EEAA and *Hajj* Atwa. "The contract specifically prohibits any action which may result in damage to the area." He adds that 35 workers were wounded during the clearing of the site and are taking legal action through the Al-Ard Centre.

Saber claims that the contractor has made millions by removing marble from the cave under the guise of cleaning the area. "We checked the files at the toll station at the beginning of the road and have reason to believe that he was taking up to 1,000 tons of marble out of the area per day. Multiply that by LE 250 per ton — the going price for marble — to see how much he made." Work in the site stopped since the Al-Ard initiated legal action in February this year.

General Ahmed says that according to Atwa's contract with the EEAA, the contractor is entitled to remove the marble dug up in the process of cleaning in compensation for his efforts.

Beni Suef Governorate officials were reluctant to take sides. "We have a limited budget for Beni Suef and we are building a new city which has priority for our money," said Heba Abdel-Karim from the governorate's Investment Services Office.

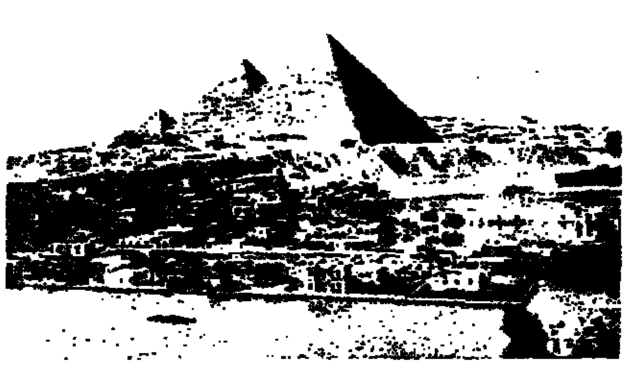




An artist's view of the transportation of limestone blocks by Egyptians

Who really built the Pyramids?

The recent upsurge of public interest in pyramid-building is underlined by a spate of new books on the market. Lyla Pinch Brock looks at the issues and the authors, and remarks on *The Ancient Egyptians: Life in the Old Kingdom*, the contribution of *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s Jill Kamil





Cairo - The avenue to the Pyramids

The last of the "great floods" in 1932 caused urban expansion and put an end to the picturesque boulevard that took turn-of-the-century travellers across agricultural land to the plateau. Below is a scene of current excavations of a bread, and related beer, facility that served the workers

Sought by sages and seers, bashed by Italian archaeologist Belzoni, raped, repaired, lit and looted — the Pyramids of Egypt have survived thousands of years of interest and abuse. They mesmerised the Greek historian Herodotus, made Napoleon feel small and provoked the curiosity of the ninth century Caliph Al-Mamum to such an extent that he broke in. Perhaps because of their bland and unrevealing exteriors, the Pyramids are believed by some to contain the secrets of the universe.

In recent years the Pyramids have attracted as much attention from mystics, quasi-religious groups and publicity-seekers as bona fide scientists, and, as a result, various nefarious claims have been made about their builders, age and construction.

This trend peaked last week when Zahi Hawass, director of the Pyramids Plateau, was asked to participate in a televised debate with two authors who insisted that the monuments were built several thousand years earlier than the scientifically-established dates. The programme followed hard on the heels of a number of documentaries, books and articles exploiting such claims.

It revived the age-old questions, who built the Pyramids and how? These questions have been treated by the popular media with mixed results: In the film *Stargate* (banned in Egypt) gravely-voiced women from outer space assume responsibility. Author Mohamed Samir Atta (*The Amazing Surprise in Solving the Mystery of Egyptian Pyramids*) confidently confirms it was the People of Aad. The theory of foreign slave labour, instigated by Herodotus and promulgated by such films as *Moses*, keeps popping up. After all, they say, how could such marvels be built by mere Egyptians?

In the midst of all this madness, a little blue book seems like a cool pool of reason and logic. Jill Kamil's *The Ancient Egyptians: Life in the Old Kingdom*. Kamil prods at the roots of a culture which reached its epitome with the Pyramid and comes up with theories on the creation of cults, the importance of festivals, and the significance of ancestor worship. Much of this is derived from 40 years' observations and experiences living in Egypt, much of it as writer and researcher on Egyptological subjects.

Kamil explores every aspect of Egyptian life from propaganda to board-games, titillating us with glimpses of Pharaonic entertainment preferences.

By tracing the growth of Egyptian society from hunters and gatherers to the stage of ultimate achievement, the book provides the student or general reader with a clear insight into Egypt's ancient past.

Book editors say that the public thirst for mummies and pyramids is never quenched. This summer a spate of new and re-issued books on Egypt's Golden Age will attempt to satisfy popular and scholarly audiences by presenting the results of recent archaeological work combined with new photographs and historical reconstructions.

Most of the authors treat the question of who built the Pyramids evasively, ignoring the Egyptians' reputed superior mathematical ability (recognised world-wide), and the fact that slavery at this time is not well-attested in Egypt. While foreign participation cannot be completely ruled out, the Czech Institute's excavations at Abusir last year discovered a relief showing Egyptians towing a pyramidion (with not a whip nor a foreigner in sight!), which would seem to confirm that the Egyptians themselves were the builders.

How the Pyramids were built remains a puzzle. Experiments by Egyptologist Mark Lehner (author of the forthcoming *The Complete Pyramids*) and a Japanese mission proved independently that the two and a half-ton blocks could be manipulated using simple methods and few men. But how were they raised into tiers?

During a recent talk at the American Research Centre in Cairo, Lehner admitted re-thinking his theory of a wrap-around ramp. Dieter Arnold, an Austrian archaeologist working at Lisht, south Fayoum, pointed out it would be impossible to take accurate levels with such a device installed. Yet, obviously, a straight ramp would be impossibly long and steep.

And as for *why* they were built, the idea of pyramid-building as a "make-work" project to fill the gap between sowing and harvesting, (the core of Kurt Mendelson's book, *The Riddle of the Pyramids*) may be passé. New information suggests construction probably continued year-round. This and other related ideas about pyramid-building are explored by Kamil in her book.

Over the last 10 years there has been a flurry of archaeological activity on the Giza Plateau: The discovery of a new "satellite" pyramid at Giza by Hawass; the German Archaeological Institute's report of a controversial "door" in the Great Pyramid (possibly a built-over air vent?); the plumbing of another boat-pit by a Japanese Mission (contents unrecovered); the restoration of the Sphinx by the Supreme Council of Antiquities under Hawass, who has also directed excavations in the Western Cemetery and the tombs of the pyramid-workmen (dating to the time of Menkaure, builder of the Third Pyramid).

During the installation of a new sewer system in Nazlet El-Simman in Giza, blocks from a causeway were found, and, although not preserved, they at least added to the architectural history of the Pyramids. Lehner has been working with Hawass and others clearing a site below the Sphinx where beer and bread-making took place.

The Ancient Egyptians: Life in the Old Kingdom, which has been substantially revised since it was first published in 1984, is guidebookish and small enough to stuff in a back-pack. Subjects are easily accessed under chapter headings, diagrams are clear and helpful. Charming line drawings by Elizabeth Rodenbeck liven the 196 pages along with little blips of Ancient Egyptian literature and colour photos spice the book's centre.

Yet *Life in the Old Kingdom* is really a sociological study, examining the impetus for the development of a high civilization at a time when most other cultures were still stuck in the Stone Age. The Egyptians themselves realised that this period, from 3,000-2,145BC, was perhaps the greatest in Egypt's history. The canons of art and architecture were established, craft industries burgeoned, trade flourished, medicine and writing developed, religion and burial practices evolved into elaborate rites. There was an urge for law, order and education as part of a "good society".

Little changed during the ensuing millennia. The pyramid-builders, although almost as remote to the people of the New Kingdom as Julius Caesar is to us, symbolised endurance. They put pyramids above their tombs at Deir El-Medina on the Theban necropolis by choosing the natural formation (the "Gum") as the backdrop for the royal necropolis. As historian Cyril Aldred wrote, "In later years the Egyptians looked back upon the Old Kingdom as a Golden Age, in which superhuman deeds were done by wise men for mighty kings. In particular, they instinctively recognised the art of its monuments as the true and characteristic utterance of the Egyptian psyche, and they returned to it again and again as a source of inspiration and a point of departure, even in times when different conditions prevailed."

The Ancient Egyptians: Life in the Old Kingdom, *by Jill Kamil is available from the American University in Cairo Bookstore and all major bookshops in Egypt. LE60.*



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Piece of the month:

Fertility goddess ushers in spring

TAWERET, the goddess of fertility and protection who assisted mothers in childbirth, is the special display at the Egyptian Museum during the period 15 April-15 May. Nevine El-Aref reports.

After a three-month break when the Graeco-Roman goddess Aphrodite remained on display, Mohamed Gomaa, the interim director general of the museum, said that the practice of drawing public attention to specific items, will be resumed. "If possible, we will treat various themes, such as the theme of maternity and motherhood, in successive months," he said.

The statue of Taweret is a fine green schist piece which shows Taweret as a pregnant hippo with human arms. Her legs are those of a lion and she leans on the *sa* sign, an emblem denoting protection. The statue was found at Karnak in a small limestone chamber where wall reliefs show that the High Priest Pabasha dedicated this piece to the consort of the god Amun, daughter of King Psamtik I. The statue was previously on display in the museum among New Kingdom items.

—Site tours—

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions.
Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vivc.edu~hoggog/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

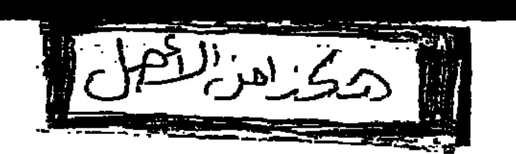
http://www.geocities.com/The Tropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.

http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u /city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayyan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**





هكذا من الإمل

Zambia zapped by Zamalek

In an impressive reversal of fate, Zamalek breezed by Zambia's Mufulira and came one step closer to a fifth African club title. Abeer Anwar reports

Like the *khamasin* storm that hit Cairo on the same day as the match, Zamalek came out of the blue to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat during the African Champions League game last week against Zambia's Mufulira.

Trailing the Zambian team by the end of the first half, 2-1, Zamalek came back in the second with what appeared to be newfound vigour and skill, nailing home four consecutive goals in the span of roughly 30 minutes and winning the match, 5-2.

While the less-than-stellar performance in the first half of the game was partially due to the strong and quick pace set by the Zambians, Zamalek's disorganised game-plan and the absence of some key veteran players, also contributed to bringing down the team's morale and level of play. Missing from the starting line-up for this key match were players like Ismail Youssef and Ashraf Qassem. As a result, Farouk El-Sayed, the team's new technical manager, was forced to field several inexperienced, yet promising players.

"Although this was an important match, I had no time to try out new strategies," explained El-Sayed. "Realistically, with six of the main players out of action, I had no choice but to field some younger players."

But following the 15 minute half-time break, Zamalek came back with a vengeance, apparently finally able to agree on how to work as a team. While this turn of events was due in part to El-Sayed's pep talk, during which he lambasted the players for having disappointed fans and officials alike with their shoddy performance, it was also a result of two key changes the new manager implemented. First, he pushed veteran midfielder Ahmed El-Kass into an attack position, then he replaced Hussein El-Sayed with Nader El-Sayed in goal. From that point on, it was smooth sailing as Zamalek began dominating the match. The series of goals began with an 8th minute score by Sami El-Shishini and a 9th minute drive home by Ayman Mansour. Later on, in the 26th and 43rd minutes of the second half, Tarek Mustafa and Ahmed El-Kass also found their mark.

With this win under their belts, Zamalek's second leg match against Mufulira, which is set to take place on 18 May in Zambia, could prove to be an easy win for the record four-time winners of this premier African club event. To qualify for the round of eight, Zamalek only needs to draw or, in the worst case scenario, lose the match 0-2. In either case, once having moved up, they seem sure to pocket the $150,000 purse awarded by the African Football Federation to the team making it to the quarter finals.



Zamalek's Kasi Said trying to score a goal while Mufulira's goal keeper attempts to defend him *photo: Mohamed Wassim*

Sailing death

MAKOTO Namba, the first Japanese yachtsman to enter the top 10 in the America's Cup world rankings, is presumed dead more than a month after he was swept into the sea from the helm of his boat, reported The Associated Press.

Namba, who sailed for Japan in the 1992 and 1995 America's Cup trials, was steering the 6.5-ton yacht Escape One at night, without a life jacket or tether, when he was hit by a 4-metre (13-foot) wave on 23 April. Namba was involved in Japan's first attempt at the America's Cup in 1987, and crewed on Nippon, the 1992 yacht entered by Nippon Challenge, the Japanese America's Cup syndicate.

Japanese Coast Guard officials are still searching for clues or the yachtsman's body.

Stich in time

MICHAEL Stich, the 1991 Wimbeldon champion and veteran German Davis Cup player said he will retire at the end of the season because of a worn-out shoulder.

Stich climbed to the world no. 2 ranking in 1994 but subsequently slid down to 26th. Since 1990, he has won 18 singles titles and nine in doubles, including an Olympic gold medal with Borris Becker at the 1992 Barcelona Games. In 1991, Stich defeated Becker in the Wimbeldon final and then went on to the 1992 Grand Slam Cup and the 1993 ATP World Championship with a finals victory over Pete Sampras. He has been on the decline, however, since 1994 when he lost the US Open final to Andre Agassi.

Stich stated that he would enter this year's French Open and Wimbeldon tournaments before ending his career in Germany's Davis Cup relegation series against Mexico in September.

Soccer surgery

FIVE months after successful heart surgery, Nigeria's Nwankwo Kanu is well enough to resume his soccer career. The 20-year-old Kanu was diagnosed last year with congenital heart disease, and received treatment in the US for the condition in November 1996.

After extensive post-operative testing by doctors at the Cleveland, Ohio hospital in which he was treated, Kanu has been judged to be in better physical shape than before the surgery.

Table tennis drama

PLAYERS and coaches threatened to withdraw from the World Table Tennis Championships in England last weekend because officials refused to find them seats to watch other competitors.

Organisers, who were apparently surprised at the sell-out audiences attracted by the event, turned players away because they had nowhere to seat them. Even Belgium's Jean-Michael Saive, one of the world's leading players and the president of the CTTP, the players union, was turned away. After lengthy protests, the organisers agreed to put in another 300 seats on the floor.

"If the organisers had not done this there would have been a boycott," said Saive.

More US Olympics?

EIGHT US cities have signed up for an Olympic race that might never be held, reported AP. Hoping to lure the Games to the United States for an unprecedented ninth time, officials from the nation's capital to the Pacific Northwest sent applications and non-refundable $100,000 checks to the US Olympic Committee, which could pick one of them to bid for the 2008 Summer Olympics.

Lining up for the chase — which might last four years and cost up to $40 million — were Baltimore, Cincinnati, Houston, New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, DC.

Prince of pain

"PRINCE" Naseem Hamed lived up to his prediction and stopped fellow Briton Billy Hardy in the first round to retain his IBF and WBO featherweight titles at the Nynex Arena in Manchester.

Hamed, wrote AP, knocked Hardy down with a right hand midway through the round, breaking the challenger's nose in the process, then immediately put him down again with a left before referee Paul Thomas stopped the fight in 1.25 minutes of the first round.

With this win, the 23-year-old Hamed extended his unbeaten record to 26-0, with 24 of his victories inside the distance. This match was his fifth defence of the WBO title, and the first of the IBF crown he took from American Tom "Boom Boom" Johnson in February. Naseem is now expected to try to unify all four titles.



photo: Ahmed Abdel-Razeq

Davis Cup dreams shattered again

With Tamer El-Sawi missing from action, Egypt fell flat on its face attempting to move into the Davis Cup Group I competition. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab explains why

If winning was the name of the game at last week's Davis Cup qualifier, then Egypt, pitted against an unimpressive Portuguese team, not only missed the main point, but may as well have missed the match entirely.

During the three day Euro-African Group II event, which was held in the Gezira Club, a clearly demoralised Egyptian squad walked away with a string of losses that once again remanded their hopes of moving into the Group I competition back somewhere in the recesses of their wildest dreams. This defeat, while nothing new for a team that has now lost this event three years in a row, threw the spotlight on just how weak the team is without its star player, Tamer El-Sawi. El-Sawi was conspicuously absent from this year's qualifiers, speculate many, as a result of financial squabbles with the Egyptian Tennis Federation. Filling his shoes this year was a less experienced and skilled Mohamed Ramadan.

Playing a series of four singles and one doubles matches, the Egyptian crew, composed of Amr Ghoneim, Gehad El-Deeb, Adli El-Shafie and Mohamed Ramadan, lost each match, leaving the final standing at Portugal's 5 to Egypt's 0. And, unlike last year's Davis Cup matches, where El-Sawi managed to give England a run for its money on Wimbeldon's main court, or the year before, when Egypt held its own until it lost 1-4 to a traditionally strong Ukranian team, this year, there were no close calls.

With El-Sawi missing from action, the weaknesses of the Egyptian team were decidedly pronounced. El-Deeb lost his singles match to Nuno Meroues, 0-6, 4-6, 6-7. Ghoneim lost 6-2, 4-6, 6-7, 3-6 and, in the doubles event, an outclassed El-Shafie teamed up with Ghoneim to lose the match, 5-7, 1-6, 0-6 to the Portuguese pair, Emanuel Cuoto and Bernardo Mota.

Clearly, given this humbling defeat, three times was not the charm for the Egyptian team. But more importantly, it has raised the question of why its success, or near success, hinges on world ranked no. 170, Tamer El-Sawi. The most obvious answer is that El-Sawi is the most skilled, mainly due to his father's support. Similarly, his skill and enthusiasm carried over to the other players. What neither he, nor the other team members have received, however, is much support from the federation. In fact, some ETF officials have gone so far as to accuse El-Sawi of staying away from this crucial event because they didn't give him the money he asked for.

El-Sawi, who is gearing up for a confrontation with the ETF next week over precisely this issue, argues that this is not the case. But whether it is or not, it seems that he holds the key, albeit perhaps a psychological one, to the possibility of Egypt moving into the Group I Davis Cup competition.





Zamalek hoop-la

BASKETBALL fever is once again upon the Zamalek Club, whose senior team has enjoyed an unbroken winning streak in both the Egyptian League and Cup games.

Just last week, Zamalek qualified for the Egypt's Cup final, defeating four-year-in-a-row champions Gezira, 73-61 in what proved to be a physical and tough to manage match.

Although Gezira led at the start of the game, Zamalek's playmaker, Ahmed Qenawi, helped bring his team ahead while their fans quickly crossed over from jubilant to ecstatic. Assisting the already strong team in their win were two foreign recruits, Lamin and Soudi, both from Mali.

With another win in the bag, Zamalek will go up against Ahli in the Cup final at the end of May. Ahli, who have held titles at both the Arab and African level, barely managed to squeeze by Alexandria's Ittihad, winning the match 73-65. Zamalek is expected to win the match-up against Ahli for the Cup, and is also expected to win the League final next Saturday.

Softening blows for boxers

A recent medical conference on boxing could lead to the introduction of safety measures in a sport long condemned as being too violent

Brain scans costing thousands of dollars could soon become the norm worldwide in professional boxing if the sport's medical experts have their way. Doctors at boxing's first medical congress, held this week in Aruba, issued a list of medical musts, ranging from bans on spectator smoking and 60-day fighting bans for boxers who are knocked out, to mandatory yearly brain scans for professional boxers. But one African orthopaedic surgeon in attendance said the costs involved made many suggestions, "a mission impossible."

Prohibitive costs or not, however, the options are few and far between. World Boxing Commission (WBC) President Jose Suliman warned that if the sport cannot be made "safe or safer, then there should not be boxing."

This, despite the efforts of those bent on banning this sport of pugilists, seems to be a remote possibility. "We have to assume that boxing will continue as always, legal or not," said Peter Richards, a British neurosurgeon who is waging a British Medical Association campaign to ban boxing. "So we need to set a standard and ensure good medical care not only for the richest boxer, but especially for the poorest."

One recommendation proposed at the conference would require boxing promoters to help fund research into boxing injuries. The doctors, who came from 83 countries to attend the WBC-sponsored conference, did not specify who would pay for other tests, such as mandatory brain scans, which cost between $250 and $3,000.

Magnetic resonance imaging tests (MRIs), considered the most accurate means of detecting brain damage in boxers, are unavailable in any but the wealthiest countries. Doctors from Africa said fighters on that continent cannot even afford AIDS tests costing $20 —roughly what they earn for an average professional fight in their country.

Other guidelines, such as barring boxers under the age of 18, and over 35, could also be hard to enforce in the sport which has no overall governing body. The WBC is one of four major world regulatory bodies for professional boxing.

In poorer countries, such as the Côte d'Ivoire, this lack of clear guidelines means that boxers are, "widely exploited and at the mercy of their trainers and managers," said radiologist Gadji Gohonru. While the top boxing prize in this West African country was $600, fighters have to finance their own medical treatment, he said.

"It's going to be a *mission impossible* for the investigations and recommendations that are to be carried out," said Godwin Kanu, a Nigerian orthopaedic surgeon and medical advisor to the Nigeria Boxing Board. "I don't see anyone willing to foot the bill."

Kanu said he thought poorer countries would have to pick and choose among the new guidelines, and suggested promoters be forced to absorb the cost.

Another conference participant disagrees. "What monetary figure can you put on protecting the boxer?" asked Frank Quill, a representative of the Oriental and Pacific Boxing Federation. Citing the Philippines as an example of a country which has already implemented some reforms in the sport, he said that President Fidel Ramos recently agreed to have the government sponsor yearly MRI scans for boxers. That promise came after a record 300,000 fans turned out to watch Filipino featherweight champion Luisito Espinoza take on Cesar Soto of Mexico. "They are showing the way to the world," said Quill. If a wealthy country like Australia failed to follow suit, he said, it would "become a laughing stock."

Other recommendations introduced during the four-day conference include: weigh-ins at least 24 hours before the bouts; worldwide screening for HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and C; reducing championship bouts from 12 to eight rounds; banning boxers who are knocked out from sparring for 30 days and from competing for 60 days' extensive medical evaluations for boxers at high risk of brain damage; and a ban on smoking in arenas.

(Report by AP)

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**



Radwan El-Kashef:

He is honest, not only about his own work, but about a lot of other things too. The film he has just finished? "It is an imitation of the film I really wanted to make"

photo: Sherif Sonbol





Scenes from *Ara' El-Balah*, which will be released shortly

The real thing

"We all imitate everything these days; buildings which look like buildings but are not, because they suddenly collapse and, as you know, collapsing is not one of the functions of a real building; books which have the appearance of books insofar as they are collections of printed pages, but are not, because they neither provide knowledge nor, usually, tell the truth," Radwan El-Kashef is on a roll. "Have you noticed what is happening to the food we eat these days?

Coffee looking like coffee and tasting like dust, tea pretending to be tea but smelling like chemicals, and the round thing that they sell in bakeries disguised as baladi bread? How do you like Egyptian vegetables now that we no longer depend on the floods of the Nile? Bananas have identity crises, and suddenly taste like cucumbers, strawberries grow as large as frogs, our most popular staple food is replaced by unspeakable ersatz." His voice builds to an outraged crescendo. He hovers, smiling amiably, peering at his spellbound listener a little shortsightedly before swooping in for the kill: "We eat lies these days, that is what is happening!"

His most recent film, *Ara' El-Balah* (Date Wine), does not escape this wholesale criticism of everything. "It is similarly tainted. It is a poor imitation of the real *Ara' El-Balah* which I have carried in my mind and of which I have written the script." He wanted to make this film a long time ago, even before *Leih ya Banafseg* (Violets are Blue), which brought him to the attention of the public. He could not find a producer because the film was "different" and nobody wanted to risk money on something that would probably be a box office flop, as he was told by all the producers he had approached at the time.

He did not even have a leading role to peg his film on, they told him, a name which would carry the story and attract the crowds. His hero is a young boy of 16, and, says El-Kashef, he saw no point in giving the role to an older famous actor masquerading as a teenager. Confronted with all these difficulties, he just shelved the project. One day, the time would be right, he thought.

"I was finally able to do it, thanks to Marianne Khoury, who accepted to produce *Ara' El-Balah*, but I had to compromise even then." Ideally, El-Kashef would have loved to shoot the film in the *Sa'id*. This is where he was born and where he spent five months of every year during his adolescence and young adulthood. His father was the *Umda* of a little village near Sohag. Life in the country was real, says El-Kashef and so were the people. It has changed now, he adds, "too many outside influences", and he does not go back that often anymore.

He can tell you countless stories tied to his village and the Nile floods before the Aswan High Dam was built. The whole life of the village revolved around the yearly miracle, back then. "One morning, the women would warn us that the floods were on their way, and all the children would run to the outskirts of the village to wait for the big wave. Suddenly we would see it coming with a roar, a huge mass of black waters, thundering down towards us. We would run back as fast as we could, screaming that it was coming, terrified that it would catch up with us. Within half an hour the aspect of the village would change entirely, with its fields drowned under the water, its dry streams suddenly gurgling."

During the first two days, everyone stayed indoors, because the floods brought with them a crop of snakes and scorpions, dislodged from their hiding places, and which roamed freely through the village. On the third day, however, the insects and reptiles disappeared and the youngsters would start bathing in the waters, the men and boys during the days, the girls in the evening, watched over and protected from men's eyes by the older women. For three months, the mood of the village would be festive. There was nothing to do except play, dance, cross the waters in little boats to visit relatives and swim in the emerald-green streams. Work in the fields only started when the waters withdrew, around October.

"My life has been shaped by these customs and by peasants' values and sense of seasons, says El-Kashef with the nostalgia that only a long-time urban dweller can convey. "Have you ever had the chance to hold a clump of earth in your hands after the Nile withdrew? It was black, dripping with the richness of the silt which gave everything we ate its distinctive taste. I am still searching for the smells and tastes of those days. Sometimes, walking in the city, I stop, mesmerised. An odour has tickled my nostrils, a sound has rung in my ears and, suddenly, I am back in my village, in those days."

He had wanted his film to take place in the *Sa'id* "because it is really about the women of my village or other neighbouring villages, when conditions changed and the men left to find work in the cities or, even worse, in the Gulf countries." But the *Sa'idi* villages have lost their character, says El-Kashef. "They do not even build their houses like they used to, anymore. They are using reinforced concrete these days." He could not find a village which resembled the location which he had always envisaged for his story, carrying it in his mind over the years. "It would not have felt authentic to shoot it where it really took place," he said, smiling at the paradox.

He shot his film in one of the oases, Dakhla, where the building traditions are still intact and the closest to what he knew in his childhood. El-Kashef is not sorry to have compromised in this case, because nature is "incredibly beautiful and untouched there". This was not imitation, it was the genuine thing, with the houses built to suit the climate and plenty of typical, narrow dark alleyways, which afford natural protection from the searing sun. And there were real artesian wells, exactly like there used to be near Sohag. "The water tastes so good from these springs," he sighs.

"In *Ara' El-Balah*, some strangers come to this village and tell the men stories of faraway places where they can make undreamed-of riches. All the men believe the strangers and follow them, abandoning the village and the women; all except a young boy of 16, who refused to go. The film is about the village deprived of its men, now a women's place, and of this young boy, the only male left to share their lives."

There are no central characters in the story, no real heroes. Rather, it is the poignant account of the material and moral destruction that emigration can cause within a small community, amputated of half of its population. Soon news filters back from Eldorado and rumours circulate that it is not the heaven the dream-mongers had described, adding to the distress of those left behind.

Anxiety and a sense of doom befalls the inhabitants. The normal, peaceful cycle of rural life has been broken irreparably. The price to pay is dear. Things will never be the same. It does not come as a surprise that El-Kashef finds the idea of emigration utterly distasteful. "I could never leave my country," he says forcefully. "I have my roots firmly planted in the land." But while he has remained faithful, the country itself has been changing. "People don't know the genuine *Sai'di*," he says. "How he used to be in the old days. The men of my village were open-minded, not at all like the stereotypes Cairenes use to describe them or as you often see them on television. My father was elated that I was interested in an artistic career, and he had a lot of respect for the cinema. He insisted, however, that I go to university first. I studied philosophy. Once this was done with, I entered the Cinema Institute. Now I am happy I listened to my father, because I would never have achieved much with what they taught me at the institute."

A good director, a real one, should have vast experience in arts, psychology, literature, science and plastic arts. "These days the institute produces imitation directors," El-Kashef smiles, aware that he has returned once again to his obsession. "I had to shoot in a location that was not the real thing," he explains, "and I had to cut many of the effects that I knew were good because they would have taken too much time. I had to finish work on location in six weeks although I knew that, to do the best possible job, I would have needed ten. All these are compromises which ultimately alter the nature of what I had really set out to do. This is why I say that I produced the imperfect copy of the film I had dreamed of."

A director in his early forties, El-Kashef has already two good, critically acclaimed, commercially quite successful films to boast about as well as his graduation project, which earned him highest honours. What does the future have in store for him? "I feel that we are on the brink of something really big. Right now, of course, things may look bad for the industry, but directors and producers are slowly starting to wake up. The Gulf market is drying up fast and we are becoming aware of the necessity to look for new outlets. Standards and taste will have to change if we are going to look towards Europe, the countries of the Maghreb and the Fertile Crescent, the US.

"Young directors are becoming more secure in their own worth, and many refuse now to cater to the whims of a famous actor/actress to keep their show going. In the recent past, whole scripts have often been entirely re-written to magnify the role of the star of the moment and ensure the commercial success of indifferent films. Many among us are not interested in such practices. Nor are we interested in selling to video companies or television. Cinema is a separate art and this is the way it has to remain."

Directors and producers have to stand up and speak their minds in defense of their art, El-Kashef insists. Undoubtedly, there are battles that will have to be fought before the circumstances are right to produce the "real" films which are El-Kashef's aim, but he is prepared. Time, he thinks, is on his side. He believes in the immense cultural, social and political influence of cinema on a public "in dire need of upgrading its artistic expectations." El-Kashef considers that "it is our job, and our duty, to teach the public the difference between an enriching artistic production and its commercial imitation, and we are up to the challenge."

Profile by **Fayza Hassan**

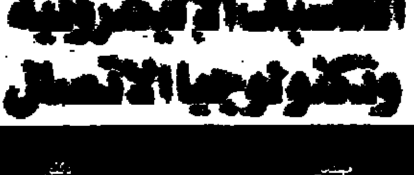
Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♣ Chairman of the Board of Al-Ahram Organisation and editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram, Ibrahim Nafie, opened last Sunday an exhibition featuring the works of Al-Ahram artists which included Makram Henein, Nagi Kamel, Nagwa El-Ashri and Mohamed El-Nasser. Among the exhibits was a sculpted portrait of George Bahgory done by Nagi. Art exhibitions have become part of Al-Ahram's traditions, and one that is appreciated by a large public interested in plastic arts as was obvious from the large attendance attracted by the event.

♥ Oh dears, my brains are tingling. I just finished this highly intelligent book *Electronic Computers and the Technology of Communication*, authored by Al-Ahram's **Mohamed Taymour Abdel-Hassib and Mahmoud Alam El-Din** both distinguished experts on the matter. Al-Ahram's Chairman **Ibrahim Nafie** was so impressed by the impeccable timing of the book's publication that he wrote the preface himself. Don't forget dears that we, at *Al-Ahram*, are what you may call pioneers in the science of communicating electronically.







Nafie with Nagi to his right and Makram Henein to his left at Al-Ahram art exhibition; technology of the '90s

♦ No sooner had I put down put down the book than, with figures and bytes dancing before my eyes, I had to slip in my organza body suit and dash to the Intercontinental Semiramis to attend, with *la crème de la crème*, a gala evening organised by the Cairo Rotary. And what a gala this was. Dior had offered two watches from its exclusive 1997 collection to be auctioned and the proceeds given to charity and Brigitte Lefèvre, the Maison Dior's representative in Cairo asked Maxie Makhlouf to conduct the auction, which he did with instantly acquired professional maestria; but would you believe, the successful bidders asked that their names be withheld. "This is money we are giving to charity, you are not supposed to advertise your good deeds," said... oops! I shall not tell you who, though let me tell you dears, if I had given that much to charity I would have hired a fiddler to sing my praise on the roof, believe me. Anyway entertainer Gwen Perry who was emceeing the event when she was not singing old favourites, was so impressed by Maxie's performance, that she insisted he join her in a duet. After dedicating his song to his lovely wife Mona, Maxie closed his eyes, and he and Gwen crooned *Feelings* to an enraptured audience.

♣ Ali Nasr Mohamed, the former Yemeni president, was invited by writer Mahmoud El-Saadani to an old fashioned typical Egyptian dinner party at the Rowing and Sporting Journalists Club in which the guests sampled trotters, different stews and pickles among other delicacies. El-Saadani's guests included Engineer Ali Wali, former minister of petroleum, Dr Aley El-Din Hilal, dean of the Faculty of Economies and Political Sciences, Ibrahim Hegazi, vice-chairman of the Journalists Club and editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram Al-Riadi* and our own Galal Nassar, member of the board of the club as well as a number of public personalities. Saadani entertained his guests with an inexhaustible repertoire of anecdotes for which he is well known.

